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ABSTRACT

Presenting the positive role phonics can play in a student's ability to learn to read, this book emphasizes that phonics can be extremely beneficial when it is integrated as a part of a balanced reading program. Based on the author's real-world experience, the book covers the entire range of practical phonics applications for the elementary classroom. It is divided into easy-to-understand sections that cover the major aspects of phonics. Every section contains multiple phonics skills that can be applied immediately in the classroom. After an introduction, chapters in the book are: (1) The Phonics vs. Whole Language Debate; (2) Understanding Phonics; (3) Teaching the Alphabet; (4) Teaching Consonants; (5) Teaching Vowel Sounds; (6) Teaching Syllabication and Word Structure Skills; (7) Reading Standards and Expectations; and (8) Informal Reading Tests. (Contains a 57-item glossary and 101 references.) (RS)

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TEACHING PHONICS for BALANCED READING

The cat was able to run across the yard. He climbed up the tree and hung from the branch. Sammy did not see him and walked under the tree. Down came the cat and landed on Sammy's head.

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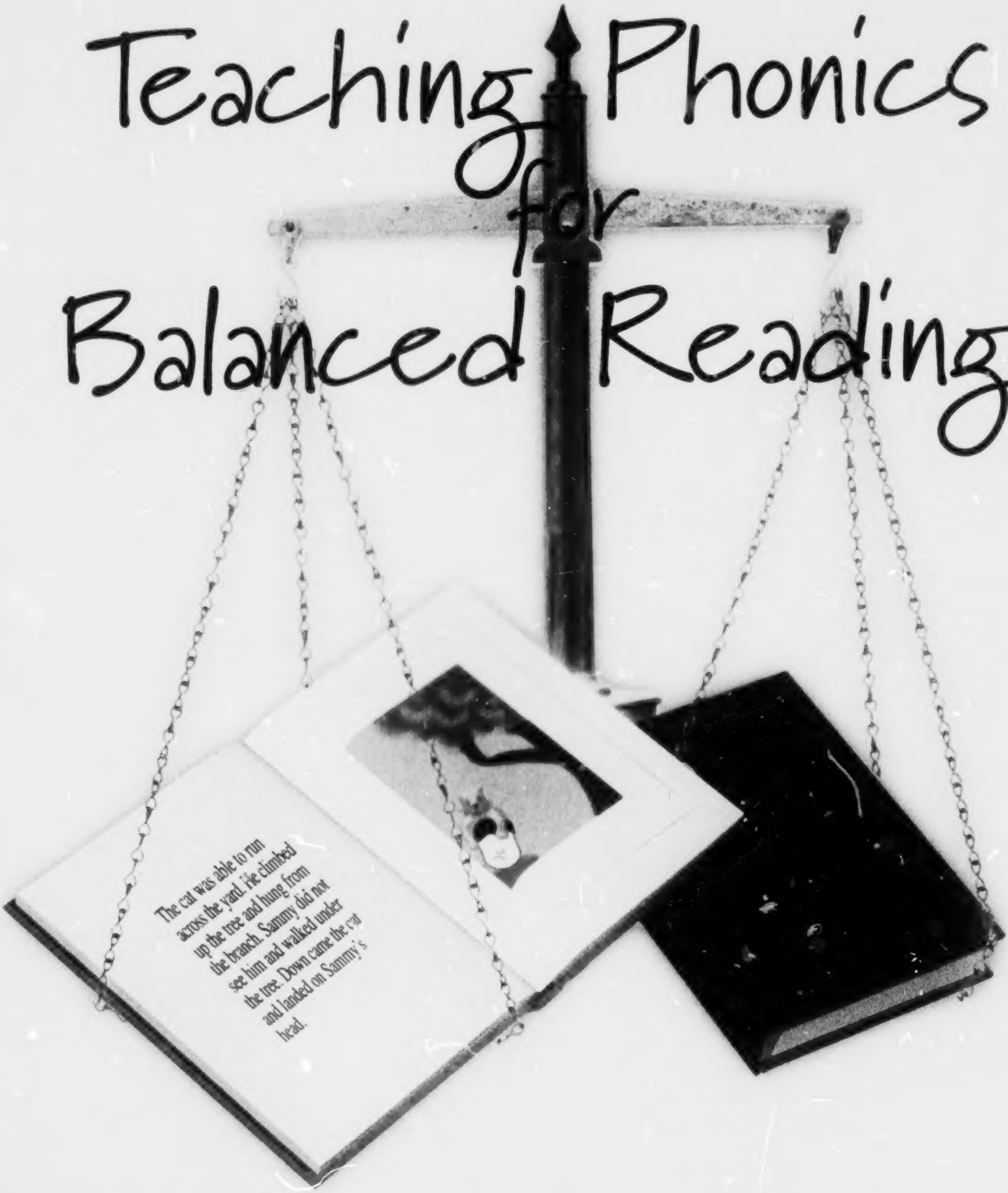
The Mindful School

Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading



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This book is dedicated to my grandson, Griffin, who enjoys his grandpa's stories almost as much as his grandpa enjoys telling them.

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Preface

My conversion to phonics was a gradual one. I learned, or "picked up," phonics a little bit at a time. Mostly I started using phonics-related material, information, and ideas that I read about in journals or books or that I gleaned from other successful teachers in the building. When I found something worked, I continued to use it. When it didn't work or fit my methods of teaching, I junked it. Mostly, I created my own kinds of materials when I saw a need for them.

Over the years as a classroom teacher I found it more and more beneficial to include phonics instruction in spelling classes. I also found that explicit group instruction in such things as syllabication and other word attack skills was very helpful to many students. As a remedial reading teacher I probably used more phonics-related material than any other type to remedy some of the problems children had identifying and reproducing the sounds of words. It was only after I became district-wide reading coordinator that I fully realized how important it is to teach phonemic awareness in kindergarten and first grade so that children can get off to a good start.

When I retired from teaching a few years ago, I decided it was time to try something new and different. With this in mind I gave away hundreds of children's books that I had accumulated over the previous 33 years, all my reference materials, my manuals, charts, dittos, and assorted paraphernalia to whoever wanted them. I never dreamed at the time that I would ever need them again.

After a short stint as a college registrar and a busy but unsuccessful career as a real estate agent, however, I found myself working with children again. I started out as a volunteer at Children's Hospital in Detroit, where I received more inspiration and love from the children than I could ever give back. Still not satisfied, I joined the ranks of substitute teachers, which was a real challenge even for a hardened veteran like me. Gradually over the last two years, I found myself becoming more and more involved with parents who were home schooling their children and a group of early elementary teachers who wanted to learn how best to use phonics material in their regular classrooms. It wasn't long before I found myself spending almost as much time in education as I had before I retired and wishing I hadn't given away all my materials

Starting from scratch again, I began organizing the material I had recently produced for teachers and parents and supplementing it with material that I had used in the past. I began to search the Web for new information about phonics and how it could be used in the classroom. I borrowed the latest reading texts from my old school district to find out what I had missed the past few years. Materials from the International Reading Association, the Texas Education Agency, and the California State Board of Education were especially helpful in putting phonics in proper perspective. As the materials and ideas began to accumulate, I decided it was time to put all of it together in book form.

I decided it was a good time to write this book for three reasons. The first was timing. All across the country there seems to be a rediscovery of the need for phonics instruction or phonemic awareness, especially in the early grades. Ten years ago a book on teaching phonics would have gathered dust on many bookshelves.

The second reason for writing this book is the immediate need for an inclusive, practical source of phonics information. Teachers and parents want to know what works and what doesn't work in reading programs. They want to know what the latest research says about each program. Yet few graduate and undergraduate courses deal directly with teaching phonics. Trying to get good information on teaching phonics from educational libraries or teachers' stores is often a frustrating experience. Teachers or parents may find a little bit of information here, a little bit there, but they rarely find the total package. Until just recently, books and scholarly articles that put phonics in proper perspective were rare indeed.

The third and best reason for writing this book has to do with the value of phonics instruction for many students. Without going into a lot of detail, I've found over the last 33 years of involvement in reading programs that most children who have severe reading problems generally need help with some aspects of phonics instruction. Many of the children I've dealt with, for example, have problems reading because they just can't reproduce all the letters of the alphabet or associate sounds with certain letters. Many of the children who fail standardized reading tests often fail for the simple reason that they cannot distinguish a short vowel from a long vowel. Others just give up on longer or unfamiliar words because they lack any kind of word attack skills, aside from guessing.

Most, if not all, of these reading problems begin early in preschool or kindergarten. Unfortunately, we do not always discover them, or find appropriate remedies, until later on when much of the psychological harm to the child's confidence may be irreversible. It is my firm conviction that competent, thorough, and positive instruction in phonemic awareness starting in the beginning stages of formal reading instruction in kindergarten, and continuing as phonics instruction throughout the elementary grades, can go a long way toward preventing many of these problems.

Introduction

PHONICS AND A BALANCED READING PROGRAM

Although this is a book about phonics, a "phonics only" approach to teaching reading is not advocated within its pages. It would be a struggle, in fact, to find an education professor or other teaching professional who would recommend the exclusive use of phonics. Even the claims of sizable reading improvement (or your money back) made by popular commercial programs such as "Hooked on Phonics" and "The Phonics Game" are viewed with great skepticism by the author. Reading should be taught in such a way that students need less and less phonics as they go along, not more. The objective of reading instruction is ultimately to get all students "unhooked from phonics."

Recent research suggests that phonemic awareness and other word analysis skills are best taught in a balanced reading program (Baumann et al. 1998; Burns 1999). Indications are that phonics works best when integrated with programs that promote sustained silent reading, miscue analysis, whole language instruction, linguistics, and word recognition.

A teacher should be like a general practitioner to the extent that not all patients get the same medicine. Some may need an aspirin. Others may need rest. A few may need surgery. When the patient (student) is healthy (can read independently), teachers should stop the medication. A teacher, like the old-fashioned country doctor, should carry around a bagful of remedies. Phonics ought to be one of the many remedies.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

While it's true that a well-balanced approach to reading that emphasizes and uses the good points of different systems is the recommended method of teaching reading, *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* presents only material that emphasizes the phonological and structural analysis aspects of reading.

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The focus here is on providing the teacher with a solid grounding in phonics and guidance on teaching phonics as part of a balanced reading program.

The goal of this book is to balance the content and ideas in such a way that they can be easily understood by those who have little information about how phonics might be used in the classroom, yet are technical enough for readers with more advanced understanding. *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* is intended as a reference book, not as a textbook to be read once and then set aside. It is hoped that teachers will want to keep this book in their classroom—to be used in making lesson plans or for informational purposes.

Each topic in *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* is presented in such a way as to be general enough to cover the entire field yet specific enough to be of practical value. Principles of phonics are explicitly laid out. Rules and generalizations are enumerated and explained. In the section on blends and digraphs, for example, the reader will be exposed to all or almost all the blends and digraphs, and so on. And when standards are discussed, specific examples will be given. All rules and examples are integrated into practical guidance on teaching phonics. The goal is for the reader to not only gain specific knowledge and examples of each topic, but also see the day-to-day application of that knowledge in the classroom.

Chapter One opens the book with a historical perspective on the debate regarding the best way to teach reading, followed by a discussion of current research on balanced reading programs and elements of effective phonics instruction. Some perspective on the phonics vs. whole word controversy is introduced by citing recent research, defining terms, and applying certain principles that most authorities would agree with.

Chapter Two tackles some of the concerns teachers have about teaching phonics, the problems involved in teaching letter-sound relationships, and the good news about phonics. This chapter should give teachers a better understanding of the order and sequencing of phonics instruction as well as insights into how it may be integrated in the classroom.

Chapter Three discusses the need to learn to identify, sound out, and reproduce the letters of the alphabet and the difficulties involved in this learning. At the end of the chapter, readers will find several activities that can be beneficial in augmenting the learning of the alphabet and its sounds. For many teachers, this is the most important chapter in the book, as so many reading problems have their origin at the very beginning stages of learning to read, specifically, learning the alphabet.

Chapters Four through Six contain material about consonants, vowels, and syllabication. Each chapter starts with ideas and concepts that are easy to understand or less complex, and then proceeds to the more complicated ideas. The structure of each chapter represents the ascending order by which a teacher generally tries to introduce material to students. Rules and generalizations are presented in order to help teachers determine which ones are worth teaching or explaining to students, and which ones have little or no value. It is generally conceded that rote memorization of most of these generalizations is a waste of time and serves little or no educational purpose. On the other hand, it is helpful for teachers to be aware of them as part of their knowledge and understanding of English orthography. Plenty of occasions will arise when this knowledge can be put to good use. Suggested classroom activities are interspersed throughout throughout these chapters, placed near the discussion of relevant phonics topics.

Chapter Seven contains a discussion of educational standards for kindergarten through fifth graders as they relate to reading and phonics. The history of the current movement toward standards and the current state of standards across the country are touched on. By way of example, the chapter includes excerpts from the reading standards of the state of Texas and the Continuum of Children's Development in Early Reading and Writing created by the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. These standards were developed by teachers and can serve as a guide for student instruction at each grade level.

The last chapter is comprised of informal tests teachers can use to evaluate certain segments of phonemic awareness and word analysis skills. These tests are specifically designed so that the teacher can quickly evaluate whether or not the child has mastered a particular skill. Using them for diagnostic or informal assessment purposes, the teacher can take note of each student's level of understanding and plan accordingly.

It must be pointed out that the manner in which the material is presented in each chapter does not necessarily reflect the exact order in which the material should be presented or learned in the classroom. The content of each chapter generally begins with the simpler concepts and proceeds from there to more complicated or harder to understand ones. The examples given for each lesson also proceed from simpler to more complex, and generally contain familiar sounds or words that students use in their active vocabulary. The particular order in which teachers may use these examples, however, will differ as the teachers' needs differ. Instead of trying to use everything in this book in the exact order presented here, it is hoped that the reader will pick and choose whatever material or ideas she finds helpful and use them as the need occurs.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that there are no miracle cures when it comes to teaching reading. No one type of program or method by itself will automatically lead all children to be successful in reading. The most important factor for the success or failure of any program is the attitude of the teacher. When a teacher has knowledge of a particular method, sees the application of the method for her students, and believes the method will work, there's a good chance even a poorly researched program will be successful. When a teacher lacks knowledge of, or does not believe in, a particular method, even the best-conceived program is destined for failure.

This book was written with the hope and expectation that teachers will gain additional knowledge of phonics, see its value and application for their classroom, and come to believe in the techniques enough so that the information provided here will make them better teachers.

Chapter 1

The Phonics vs. Whole Language Debate

b
The bunny is eating.

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Questions regarding the nature, extent, and role of phonics instruction in beginning reading programs have been a concern of educators for over a hundred years. In the 1990s the pendulum has swung from whole language at one extreme to a heavy emphasis on phonics at the other. It now rests somewhere in the middle.

HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

Although the content of reading instruction changed considerably in the first two centuries of public education in this country, there was very little change in the method of teaching reading. *What* was being taught—the Bible, morality, and patriotism—was much more important than *how* it was being taught. Beginning with the *New England Primer,* published in England in 1683, instruction in the alphabet and phonics was always stressed first. The children first learned the letters, letter syllables, spellings of sounds, and then the reading text. After the *New England Primer* came a long string of spelling books that were used to teach reading. The most famous of these was Noah Webster's *The American Spelling Book,* published in the 1780s and affectionately called the Blue Backed Speller, which over a period of about thirty years became one of the best-selling readers of all time, with a total distribution of 24 million copies (Smith 1986). The first part of the speller contained rules, followed by lessons on learning the alphabet, syllable and consonant combinations, and various word lists to be sounded out according to the number of syllables.

With the arrival of Horace Mann on the educational scene in the mid 1800s, however, almost two hundred years of phonics-based reading programs came to a sudden end. Horace Mann, as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, was so impressed by the order and universality of Prussian education, he publicly denounced phonics and advocated the whole-word method of teaching reading. Mann (sometimes referred to as the father of modern education) was such a persuasive individual that his system gradually spread to other states. *McGuffey's Eclectic Reader,* published in 1857, stressed learning appropriate sight words according to grade levels and followed an organized plan that controlled sentence length and vocabulary to match the developmental level of the student (Strickland 1998). Comprehension became the key to reading, and phonics instruction was relegated to a limited role or neglected altogether. Over a period of seventy years the whole-word method and controlled vocabulary readers gradually became the dominant types of reading instruction (Smith 1986).

In the 1920s and 1930s two of the most respected reading authorities of the time, Arthur Gates and William Gray, helped push phonics further into oblivion by virtually excluding it in two new series of popular basal readers. Gates's series, Work-Play Books, was very colorful—printed in three primary colors—and contained realistic stories. Gates was against phonics drills and in favor of systematic, sequential study of words (Smith 1986).

William Gray, the author of the famous Dick and Jane readers published by Scott Foresman and Company, was equally opposed to what he called "old mechanical phonics drills" and "dull content" of phonics-based readers (Chall 1967, 97). Gray believed that early emphasis on phonics instruction led to mechanical "word-by-word" reading and advocated a "meaning-first, word analysis–later" approach (Chall 1967, 98).

Most reading authorities of the 1940s and 1950s began to follow the same philosophy as these two successful authorities. By the 1950s basal readers that followed the whole-word, look-say, meaning-first, phonics little-and-later approach were used by almost all public school teachers (Adams 1998).

Just as Horace Mann began to question the value of phonics a hundred years before, so too did reading authorities in the mid 1950s begin to question the value of the whole-word and controlled vocabulary methods of teaching reading. First came the publication of Rudolph Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* in 1955 and his stinging attack on the look-say method, which he believed to be the great destroyer of democracy and the American dream. Although rejected by most educators for its lack of research, the book nonetheless became a best-seller and was quoted widely by just about everyone who found fault with the educational practices of that time.

In the mid to late 1970s a different view of reading called whole language began to take root in the United States. This came about primarily as a result of the efforts of noted psycholinguist Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith, a cognitive psychologist who developed the theory of whole language in the late 1960s (Collins 1997).

Unlike previous reading programs, whole language did not bring with it a new set of reading books, workbooks, or other specific materials to be mastered. In whole-language classes reading, writing, and spelling skills are taught when the students have the need to learn them and while they are engaged in real-life tasks. Within this framework, phonics is relegated to one of many clueing systems by which students learn to read. Phonics is taught only when it is needed, useful, and in context, rather than as a prerequisite for reading (Weaver 1990).

Responding to the popular backlash at reading methods triggered by Flesch's book and the rising popularity of whole language, many researchers tried to determine the best way to teach reading. The most decisive answer came as a result of extensive research by Jeanne Chall and her subsequent book, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967). Chall's three-plus years of research concluded that programs that emphasized systematic instruction in teaching letter-sound relationships (i.e., phonics) lead to higher achievement. Many subsequent studies (e.g., Bond and Dykstra 1967) tended to substantiate Chall's conclusions. With the publication of *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* (Anderson et al. 1985), the popularization of commercial programs such as "The Phonics Game" and "Hooked on Phonics," and Marilyn Adams's 1990 classic *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (updated in 1998), which supported Chall's original findings, educators began to rethink the role and value of phonics instruction in the classroom.

As the pendulum of change once swung from phonics to look-say to whole language, by the close of the twentieth century it was now swinging back to phonics.

HOW PHONICS IS VIEWED TODAY

Fortunately, the debate and the rhetoric are beginning to subside. More and more educators are beginning to realize that this is not an either-or issue, but one that lends itself to common sense. The International Reading Association's position paper on the role of phonics in reading instruction sums it up this way: "Rather than engage in debates about whether phonics should or should not be taught, effective teachers of reading and writing ask when, how, how much, and under what circumstances phonics should be taught" (1997). Another educator put the issue in proper perspective when she cautioned teachers, "Don't spend time debating whether to teach phonics, spelling, grammar, and other skills of literacy. Do spend time discussing how to teach them in a way that contributes to the learner's self improvement" (Strickland 1994–1995, 299).

It seems most elementary teachers concur with these two positions. For example, in a recent national study, 3,199 public school teachers of prekindergarten through fifth grade were selected randomly from a list of nearly one million teachers. These teachers were mailed an extensive survey regarding reading instruction and practices. Of this number, 1,207 usable surveys were returned. The major finding regarding the debate revealed that most elementary teachers were on neither side of the issue. The survey clearly pointed out, "The majority of teachers embrace a balanced, eclectic approach to reading instruction, blending phonics and holistic principles and practices in compatible ways" (Baumann et al. 1998, 636). The summary of their conclusions, listed in figure 1.1, is certainly worth reviewing.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE PHONICS PROGRAM

A significant amount of research indicates that early phonics instruction plays an important part in getting children started in reading. Research tells us, for example, that knowing the names and sounds of the letters of the alphabet is one of the best indicators of success in reading (Chall 1967). The second best indicator is "phonemic awareness"—awareness of smaller units of sound within a word (Adams 1998). Early decoding skills can be used to predict later skills in reading comprehension (Beck and Juel 1995).

Marilyn Adams summarizes the conclusion of many studies as follows:

> Collectively these studies suggest with impressive consistency that programs including systematic instruction on letter-to-sound correspondences lead to higher achievement in both word recognition and spelling, at least in the early grades and especially for lower or economically disadvantaged students (Adams 1998, 31).

No matter what the research says, however, the most important consideration in any program is that instruction be done well.

Stahl, Duffy-Hester, and Stahl (1998) listed seven principles of an effective phonics program and the research that underlies these principles. Below are the seven principles (reprinted with permission of the International Reading Association), along with brief explanations.

1. Effective phonics instruction should develop the alphabetical principle.

   The alphabetical principle is the notion that letters in words stand for specific sounds. As awareness develops, students begin to learn more about letters and sounds and how they are related. This would include

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Elementary Teachers' Beliefs, Priorities, and Reported Practices Involving Phonics and Whole Language Instruction

Major Finding: A majority of teachers embrace a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction, blending phonics and holistic principles and practices.

Philosophically, a significant majority of teachers believed...

- In a balanced approach—combining skills with literature and language-rich activities (89%).
- In an eclectic approach—drawing from multiple perspectives and materials (76%).
- That phonics should be taught directly so readers become skillful and fluent (63%).
- That students need to be immersed in literature and literacy to achieve fluency (71%).

Teachers dedicated time for both skill instruction and holistic, immersion activities.

- Teachers, on average, spent 2 hours and 23 minutes each day on reading and literacy.
- 55 of these minutes were dedicated to teacher-directed skill and strategy instruction lessons.
- Teachers dedicated moderate or more time to instruction in reading strategies, vocabulary, phonics/decoding, comprehension, critical reading, content reading, and spelling.
- Teachers also dedicated moderate or more time to holistic, immersion practices such as reading aloud, students reading orally or silently, literature responses, and process writing.

Teachers taught phonics, decoding, and word identification skills.

- Overall, 88% of teachers held the goal of developing readers who were skillful and strategic in word identification, fluency, and comprehension.
- When asked which reading skills were essential or important, the vast majority of the K–2 teachers responded with instruction in phonics (99%), contextual analysis (99%), structural analysis (93%), sight words (96%), and meaning vocabulary (99%).
- K–2 teachers were most likely to employ systematic instruction in synthetic phonics (66%) or analytic phonics (40%), with fewer teaching phonics on an as-needed basis (19%).
- K–2 teachers embraced an emergent literacy perspective (70%) and rarely used conventional phonics workbooks.
- K–2 teachers complemented their explicit phonics instruction with phonics instruction through word families/phonograms (66%), in the context of children's literature (62%), and through spelling and writing activities (73%).

Figure 1.1

Teachers also employ holistic, process, and immersion instructional practice.

- Overall, 94% of teachers held the goal of developing readers who were independent and motivated to choose, appreciate, and enjoy literature.
- Teachers used children's literature: Most first-grade teachers reported moderate, predominant, or exclusive use of big books (84%) and picture trade books (81%); similarly, 72% of fourth-/fifth-grade teachers reported moderate or greater use of chapter trade books.
- PreK–2 teachers regularly read aloud (97%), accepted invented spellings (85%), and engaged children in oral language (83%), journal writing (78%), and reading response (69%) activities.
- Grades 3–5 teachers regularly taught comprehension (89%) and vocabulary (80%), provided literature response activities (79%), and used trade books instructionally (67%).

Baumann, J. F., Hoffman, J. V., Moon, J., and Duffy-Hester, A. M. (1998, May). "Where are teachers' voices in the phonics/whole language debate?" Results from a survey of U.S. elementary classroom teachers. *The Reading Teacher,* 51(8), 636–650. Reprinted with permission of James F. Baumann and the International Reading Association. © International Reading Association.

Figure 1.1 (cont'd)

more advanced learning: consonant blends and digraphs, vowel sounds, and phonograms.

2. Effective phonics instruction should develop phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness, one of the most important concepts to arise from the past twenty years of research in reading, can be defined as an awareness of sounds (phonemes) in *spoken* words. Many different activities can be used to promote phonological awareness. These include one or more of the following activities:

- Rhyming, either by recognizing rhymes or rhyme production
- Word-to-word matching tasks, which determine whether a series of words begins or ends with the same sound or sounds
- Sounds-to-words matching tasks, which involve having a student determine whether a particular sound can be found in a word (e.g., determining whether there is an /m/ in *man*)
- Initial (or final) sound identification, in which the student gives the first (or last) sound in a spoken word (e.g., /f/ the first sound in *fish;* /d/ the last sound in *did*)
- Segmentation, which involves breaking a word up into sounds, a very difficult task for children to do orally, usually requiring some kind of concrete aid, such as Elkonin boxes

- Blending, the flip side of segmentation, which involves putting spoken sounds together in a word (e.g., recognizing that /k/a/t/ is *cat*)
- Deletion and manipulation, in which a student is told to mentally remove a portion of the word to make another word (e.g., the student is asked to say *coat*, and then to say it again without the /k/)

3. Effective phonics instruction should provide a thorough grounding in the letters.

   Students need to know the names of the letters automatically, without thinking about the shape or form of each letter, and recognize them without a conscious effort. Although there is no effective research to indicate the best order for teaching the letters, an effective phonics program will make sure that students can identify both capital and lowercase letters individually and in any order.

4. Effective phonics instruction should not teach rules, need not use worksheets, should not dominate instruction, and does not have to be boring.

   Phonics programs in the past required that students memorize rules, even when the rules were not consistent, and spend up to sixty percent or more of the time allotted for reading on workbook activities. Studies have indicated that although a rule or generalization may be useful for clarifying a certain aspect of a word under study, students need not necessarily memorize that rule (Clymer 1963). Currently, students spend less time with workbooks and more time reading connected text. If phonics lessons are kept short and to the point, and the teacher is highly motivated, then phonics instruction need not be boring.

5. Effective phonics instruction provides sufficient practice in reading words.

   Three types of practice should be provided in an effective phonics program: reading words in isolation, reading words in stories, and writing words.

   - *Reading words in isolation.* Some programs will present two or three words in isolation, others may present as many as fifty or more. It is important to learn words in isolation so that students can concentrate on words with certain spelling patterns without the distraction of context. Effective phonics instruction should provide enough words so that students can learn to recognize words automatically, but not so many that the task becomes boring.

- *Reading words in stories.* The primary purpose of reading is comprehension. When words are presented in context, students may apply phonetic skill to figure out the meaning of a word. This allows for comprehension of the message as well as sounding out words. It is suggested that students be exposed to some texts that have a high percentage of words with the same spelling or rhyming patterns taught in phonics lessons—*The Cat in the Hat,* for example.
- *Writing words.* Practice in writing words from dictation, with or without invented spelling, can be beneficial for learning and practicing letter-sound relationships. It makes good sense to have students write related words that have the same sound or letters or that follow a generalization previously learned or presented in reading class.

6. Effective phonics instruction leads to automatic word recognition.

   In order for students to read effectively, they need to be able to read words quickly and automatically. Although students need a method for decoding words, we also don't want them to be always in the process of decoding. Learning phonics skills in isolation, listening to stories read by teacher and parents, and using words in context and in writing all contribute to reading for meaning. Phonics instruction should not be considered as an end in itself, but rather as a means to the end of helping students read automatically.

7. Effective phonics instruction is one part of reading instruction.

   In the beginning students need a sound background in letter-sound correspondence and should be able to apply this knowledge to recognizing words quickly and automatically. At the same time students need to learn that reading is fun and that there is more to reading than just sounding out. A well-balanced approach is recommended to allow students opportunities to discuss and question the content, choose some of the books they read, and learn the real value of reading. Although phonics instruction is an extremely important part of reading, it is only a part.

THE NEED FOR A BALANCED READING PROGRAM

The real dilemma a teacher faces is not one of what to choose for teaching reading, but how each method can best meet the needs of individual students. Phonics, as imperfect as it may be in certain situations, plays an important

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role, probably the most important role, in helping beginning readers to unlock new words. In fact, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, while it advocates a balanced approach to teaching beginning reading, also states rather bluntly, "Children cannot learn to read without an understanding of phonics" (National Association for the Education of Young Children 1997, 1). The association puts the subject in proper perspective, however, by adding, "The question in early childhood programs is not whether to teach 'phonics' or 'whole language learning,' but how to teach phonics in context—rather than in isolation, so that children make connections between letters, sounds, and meaning" (1997, 1).

While phonics instruction is important, other methods that put emphasis on learning whole words also have a role, especially at the beginning stages of reading to get students started. Dozens of very common and high-frequency words (*one, laugh, love, come, does, two, gone,* etc.) defy phonetic analysis and may be better taught as whole words. Whole language and other linguistic approaches, which attempt to apply scientific knowledge of language to reading, have a valuable coordinating role of putting the reading process in a broader perspective and directing it toward the ultimate end of reading—comprehension. It is difficult to conceive of anyone becoming a good teacher of reading by using one method exclusively. As one authority put it, "Any strategy of reading instruction based on a single principle is incomplete, no matter how valid the principle" (Smith et al. 1970, 270). In a review of studies of several different methods of teaching reading, Bond and Dykstra agree with the general conclusion of the national teachers' survey. They state: "A composite of methods would produce the best results and an effort should be made to determine what each method would contribute to the reading program" (Bond and Dykstra 1967, 358).

The need for a balanced instruction in reading classes received wide attention in two reports by the California State Board of Education—*Every Child a Reader: Report of the California Reading Task Force* in 1995 and *Teaching Reading: A Balanced, Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Reading in Prekindergarten through Grade Three* in 1996. These two reports placed partial blame for the low reading achievement scores in California on the one-dimensional literature-based program mandated almost ten years earlier. They called for a balanced reading program that stresses both separate and explicit skill instruction along with language-rich literature instruction. Much of the material from these two studies was included in *Teaching Our Children to Read* by Bill Honig (1996). For beginning reading programs, Honig recommends daily instruction that includes one hour of direct instruction in letter-sound correspondence and familiar word patterns and working on words and their spelling. He also suggests an additional hour be spent in shared reading, reading children's literature, students' reactions and opinions, and the teaching of writing.

Systematic, Explicit Phonics in a Balanced Reading Program

Today, more and more studies are stressing the need for systematic, explicit phonics within a balanced reading program. Michael Pressley (1998), for example, advocated separating explicit skills instruction with accompanying practice sessions. "His interpretation of balanced instruction includes systematic, explicit instruction and practice focused on decoding and comprehension" (Freppon and Dahl 1998, 244). Earlier studies showed explicit phonics instruction is more effective for teaching reading to children at risk (Adams 1998; Honig 1995; Chall 1967; and others).

In 1996 the California State Board of Education mandated that the state adopt materials in grades one through eight that include systematic, explicit phonics, spelling, and basic computational skills (California State Board of Education 1996). In the 1995 *Report of the California Reading Task Force,* reading was defined so as to include phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of emergent readers. Explicit phonics was called the heart of the reading program (California State Board of Education 1995).

Other states, primarily Texas and Florida, have also begun extensive efforts to emphasize the teaching of phonics in a systematic, explicit manner in a balanced reading program. Nationally, a general trend now swings the pendulum back toward phonics again with the one stipulation that it occur in the context of a balanced reading program.

Many reading teachers, especially in the last decade or so, have been taught that the most effective way to teach specific skills is to present them only when the need arises. Essentially, this is correct. As a result of that thinking, however, many teachers rarely attempt to teach phonics in any kind of systematic or explicit manner. They were taught that phonics drills, per se, and learning generalizations are not only too old-fashioned but boring and ineffective as well. Today, more and more teachers are discovering what the research reveals, that there is a definite place for organized, systematic, and explicit phonics instruction where word lists, word families, and decoding skills are directly taught in the classroom.

With this changing of thinking, reading teachers are now caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they want to give their students more opportunities to develop their phonics skills with specific lessons and activities that will develop those skills. On the other hand, they don't want to turn off their students to reading by making it so repetitious that it becomes boring and unattractive. So what to do?

The answer seems to be that too much of anything is too much. A few teachers rely heavily on phonics, and their programs are very effective. A few teachers rely heavily on whole language, and they are equally effective. Some teachers are just so gifted they could be very effective if they only used the yellow pages. The vast majority of teachers, however, are now looking for ways to balance their reading programs—seeking a program that makes students aware of the phonemic nature of the language, yet at the same time provides opportunities to include other methods as well. As one authority put it,

> They (teachers) want each part of the curriculum to build on the strength of others. Classroom practitioners are not accepting the all or nothing methodologies but instead are looking for a feasible and compatible blend of practices—a balanced approach to reading (Burns 1999, p ix).

A balanced program doesn't always mean, however, that learning will be easy or that children will just enjoy themselves to death at every moment. There are times when reading class will not be entertaining or even enjoyable for all students. Sometimes there will be no easy way to present specific lessons or skills, except through frequent repetition and additional practice. On the other hand, when teachers give students the opportunity to meet with success, praise them for their efforts, reward them for their progress, try to make repetitious tasks as enjoyable as possible, and remain positive about what they are asking the students to do, most educational tasks are made very palatable for students—even drills.

Wherever one finds oneself in the reading debate, it must be remembered that methods of teaching reading, by themselves, solve nothing. It's how and when the methods are used and applied that make the difference between success and failure. Teaching reading is more than just a science; it's an art.

THE TEACHER EFFECT

More than anything else, teachers of reading ought to be aware of an underlying principle that directly affects the total outcome of efforts. This principle, which is so hard to detect or even define, is called the "teacher effect." Simply put, it means that if a teacher doesn't understand or believe in what she is expected to do, she will sabotage even the best of programs and make them ineffective (Stahl et al. 1998). This can happen even when the teacher thinks she is following the lesson plans or prescribed curriculum. The two key ingredients of making any educational program work effectively are knowledge of the subject and belief in the system. The teacher effect partially explains why teachers in the same grade level, using the same system and materials, can produce dramatically different results and, inversely, why teachers using different systems and materials can produce the same results. When it comes to teaching phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and structural analysis of words, the conclusion is obvious: the teacher needs training in this field and must believe the system will work. As one authority put it:

> The "teacher effect" (research) tells us that teachers need to be given a clear rationale for being asked to change their reading methods. The new method has to make sense and be designed so that it works in the classroom, with curriculum materials and lesson plans. The teacher must be thoroughly trained, so that she feels confident and comfortable with the new approach (McGuinness 1997, 171–172).

CONCLUSION

Sometimes teachers and parents get caught in the middle of the phonics debate and find it difficult to find the middle ground.

On the one hand, they might be taken in by the exaggerated claims made by many phonics proponents and popular commercial programs. In a rush for a quick solution, the claims of immediate improvement in reading skills, renewed enthusiasm, and jumps in grade levels—or your money back—are awfully hard to resist. After a while teachers and parents who go overboard on phonics may find out, much to their chagrin, that too much phonics is just as bad as no phonics at all.

On the other hand, some teachers may simply ignore the claims of phonics proponents, write off phonics as out-of-date, and continue teaching the same way they did before. Or, more likely, teachers believe the teacher's edition of the basal reader, or the local curriculum guide, contains enough phonics information to satisfy the needs of their students. Both these views mean these teachers will miss out on materials and procedures that could prove helpful in certain situations.

Teachers should not be satisfied with just following the teacher's guide because it presents a little bit of phonics here and there. Although the phonics found in teacher's guides might be presented sequentially and structured to meet the needs of students at a certain stage, students rarely learn in perfect sequence. All students are not on the same track. Reading needs are just as individual as a child. Some students will need to go forward with their learning, while others will have to go back for review. In other words, to do an adequate job, good teachers should seek other sources and other activities than those cited in their guides. Good teachers attempt to tailor content and methods to fit the students' needs, rather than trying to fit students into a preconceived mold of learning. And good teachers are pragmatic when it comes to methods of teaching reading. They need to find out what drills, activities, games, and procedures work best for them in particular situations and circumstances, and then use that material—phonics or other—to obtain the desired results.

Chapter 2

Understanding Phonics

Phonic?
Phonetic?
Phonemic Awareness?
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sp
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One of the reasons disagreement on phonics still exists in some quarters is not everyone—not even the experts themselves—understands just what is meant by "teaching phonics." The definition of phonics, the extent of phonics instruction, the sequencing of instruction, even the time and place of instruction, have been the subjects of heated debate for the last half century.

COMMON RESERVATIONS ABOUT TEACHING PHONICS

Confusing Terminology: Ask two teachers to define phonics and you'll probably get two different answers. The terms *phonetics, phonics,* and *phonemic awareness* are sometimes used interchangeably, although each word has a different emphasis and different meaning. Phonetics can be defined as "that segment of linguistic science, which deals with speech sounds, how these sounds are made vocally, sound changes which develop in language, and the relation of speech sounds to the total language process" (Heilman 1966, 2). Phonics, on the other hand, is defined as, "a facet of reading instruction teaching speech sounds of letters and groups of letters in words" (Adams 1998, 52). "Phonemic awareness is the understanding or insight that a word is made up of a series of discrete sounds. . . . This awareness includes the ability to pick out and manipulate sounds in spoken words" (Blevins 1998, 28). Phonemic awareness is generally considered the first step in phonics instruction and lays the foundation for more extensive phonics (Stahl et al. 1998). In other words, phonetics is the science of speech sounds, phonics is the application of that science in developing reading and spelling skills, and phonemic awareness has to do with individual sounds in words. Putting it allegorically, phonetics is the pie. Phonics is a slice of that pie. Phonemic awareness sets the table for phonics.

Just reading the three definitions above and trying to figure out how they may have relevance for a reading program, however, still leaves the teacher in limbo. The terms phonics and phonemic awareness are too narrow to explain the complexities involved in the reading process; and phonetics is too broad and complicated to have meaning for children learning how to read.

Confusing Methods: Another reason for the reluctance of some to use phonics instruction in the classroom lies in the fact that the reading program most teachers are currently using already contains some phonics. Many whole language programs, for example, already include instruction in phonemic awareness as a clueing system for unlocking word meaning. If teaching the "phonetic method" means simply teaching letter-sound relationships, almost all methods of teaching reading could be described as phonetic.

Another reason for the confusion lies in the fact that programs claiming to be phonics-based differ greatly from each other in many resects. In *Approaches to Beginning Reading,* R. C. Aukerman (1984) identified over 100 different phonics-type reading programs. Yet these same programs can be as different from each other as night and day. As one observer pointed out, "They (phonics programs) differ in starting point as well as ending point. . . . They differ in methods, materials, procedures, and everything taught in between. . . . They differ in fundamental strictures and assumptions about what to and what not to teach, about how to and how not to teach" (Adams 1998, 25–26). These differences are not in teaching style or procedure alone, but often involve genuine conflicts and incompatibilities.

Since phonics programs involve so many different approaches, techniques, and philosophies, and since no one program can be pointed out as a model of what a good phonics program ought to be, it is not difficult to understand why there is such confusion and controversy about the subject.

Unanswered Questions: Because of the confusion mentioned above and the polarizing rhetoric still coming from some whole language advocates, teachers have many questions about teaching phonics. Should we teach words in isolation? What about drills? What kinds of drills are we talking about? How long and how many? Should phonics instruction take place only in context (implicit), or can it be isolated (explicit)? How do word analysis skills fit into the picture? What method works best for all my students?

Still others are reluctant to teach phonics because of past experiences with it. They have an uncomfortable feeling that phonics is not only too old-fashioned for our modern world, but it conjures up thoughts of making reading class a series of drills ("drill and kill"), repetitions ad nauseam, and rote memorization of rules that are inconsistent at best. They are afraid reading class will go backward to the days "when kids never saw anything that wasn't purple—the color of old-fashioned ditto sheets" (Jones 1996, 4). These teachers might equate phonics with boring and unrealistic sentences such as "Mat sat on a hat," or "Let men set a net," where the learning of a particular sound becomes more important than understanding what is read. For a few teachers their memory of, and experience with, phonics carries a lot of baggage and brings back haunting memories of what they themselves went through in learning to read. As in other facets of life, it is often the abuses of the system, or the extremes of the position, that one remembers most to the detriment of the whole.

With a clearer understanding of phonics and English orthography, these reservations can be banished. This chapter should help teachers begin to see through the fog that seems to surround phonics. The purpose of this book is to help teachers become well informed and confident of their knowledge about phonics so that they can use it as part of an effective reading program.

DEFINING PHONICS

So far, we have had an overview of the confusion regarding the exact definition of phonics and what constitutes a phonetic reading program. Now, for the sake of clarity, let us go into more detail about the definition of the term phonics as it is used here. In this book, "phonics" will be interpreted in its broadest connotations.

Phonics, as used here, includes the notion of phonemic awareness, or the understanding that speech is composed of a series of individual sounds or phonemes and the ability to discern individual sounds in spoken words. Although the terms phonics and phonemic awareness are often used interchangeably, they are different from each other in several ways. Phonemic awareness has to do with spoken sounds, and most phonemic awareness tasks are oral. Phonics has to do with the relationship between the sounds and written symbols and the sound-spelling relationship associated with print (Blevins 1998, 28).

Our definition of phonics includes an understanding of the alphabetical principle, or the realization that letters in words may stand for specific sounds. As the awareness of the alphabetical principle develops and increases, students begin to use that knowledge and apply it to more complex orthographies such as consonant blends, digraphs, diphthongs, and phonograms (Stahl et al. 1998, 339).

Structural analysis also comes under the umbrella of phonics as it is defined in this book. Structural analysis is a method of learning words and meaning by noting structural changes that differentiate between words having common roots (Heilman 1966). These changes include the addition of inflectional endings, modification resulting in prefixes and suffixes being added to known words, and the combining of words to make compounds and contractions. The ability to sound out parts of words individually will help students determine the pronunciation and meaning of new words (Heilman 1966).

Last, phonics as defined here includes the concept of syllabication, or the ability to divide longer and unknown words into syllables in order to sound them out and arrive at meaning. This is a skill that is carried on and used in later life when literate adults encounter unknown names, words from other languages, or unfamiliar terminology.

PHONEMES AND GRAPHEMES: THE REAL CHALLENGE OF TEACHING PHONICS

The major problem with trying to teach sound-letter relationships, and one of the main reasons teachers learn and use other approaches to teaching reading, stems directly from the fact that English is not a phonemic language. Unlike most other orthographies, or spelling systems, English does not have a perfect, or, in many cases, even a close or consistent relationship between letter and sound. Unlike other languages that have a more consistent relationship between sound and symbol, English has few completely consistent rules to assist in the pronunciation of words. Italian and Turkish use 27 letters to represent 27 basic sounds. German uses 38 symbols for 36 sounds. The *New World Dictionary* (1974) shows that the forty-plus phonemes, or sounds, of English can be represented by 251 different spellings.

In English, a reader who tries to sound out unfamiliar words can just as easily be mislead by a letter, or combination of letters, as helped. Picture the young reader who finds out, much to his embarrassment, that a single letter sound that he learned and applied to decode unfamiliar words in one situation may misdirect him in another situation. He learns that *no* and *go* have the long /o/ sound at the end of the word, then he applies the same reasoning to *do* and *to* and finds out he is wrong. He learns that the short /e/ sound is usually represented with a single *e*, then quickly runs across the many exceptions in words such as *bread, said, many, friend, says, head,* etc. He learns how to pronounce the word *through* then finds out that the combination *ough* can also be pronounced in seven other ways: *thought, though, tough, bough, bought, hiccough,* and *cough*. Unlike most other languages of the world, one cannot be absolutely sure how to spell or write a word in English if one has only heard it spoken and never seen it written. Inversely, one cannot be absolutely sure how to pronounce a word if one only saw it in its written form but never heard it

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pronounced. The problem of the inconsistent letter-sound relationship in English is humorously illustrated in the following limerick by an unknown author published by the Spelling Reform Association.

It Made the Children Schrique
A teacher whose spelling is unique
Thus wrote down the days of the weque.
The first is spelt, "Sonday"
The second day, "Munday"
And now a new teacher they seque.

Correlating Phonemes and Graphemes

No doubt the most debilitating factor in learning to read, write, and spell is that in most cases there is not a consistent one-to-one relationship between the letter (grapheme) and the sound the letter makes (phoneme). The alphabet has only 26 graphemes, yet there are at least 40 phonemes. By actual count English is 14 letters short, but really the deficiency is more like 17 since three of the letters (*c, q,* and *x*) are redundant in that they repeat sounds symbolized by other letters. English gets around this problem of not enough letters to represent the phonemes of the language in two ways: it uses two or more letters in combinations to create digraphs (*th, ng, oi, oo, eigh, ough,* etc.), or one letter can serve for more than one sound (e.g., *a = fat, father, any, what; o = love, move, wolf, woman,* etc.).

Taking all these factors into account, the child just beginning to learn to read soon finds out that learning the alphabet and the sounds of the letters is quite a bundle. Mario Pei in *The Story of the English Language* sums it up this way: ". . . our spelling is more than irrational—it is inhuman and forms the bane not merely of foreigners, but of our own younger generations, compelled to devote interminable hours to learning a system which is the soul and essence of anarchy" (Pei 1967, 338).

The Sounds of English

Figure 2.1 is a listing of the major phoneme and grapheme correspondences (sound to symbol relationships) and examples of the various spellings of a single phoneme that regularly appear in print. The percentages that appear in parentheses after some spellings indicate the number of times, or frequency, a particular variation of the spelling was used to represent its corresponding phoneme in a study of the 17,000 most frequently used words in English by

Paul Hanna and others in 1966. Percentages are given for the highest frequency spellings.

It must be pointed out that since phonemes represent sounds, and sounds differ according to stress, accents, dialects, and other factors, linguists do not always agree on the exact number of phonemes. Generally, most authorities conclude that English has at least forty to forty-four phonemes.

In learning to count, a child's logic is not impeded. The first twelve numbers require memorization, but once the teens are reached a rational and consistent way of counting and numbering persists and makes it easy to carry that process into the 20s, 30s, 40s, and on into the hundreds and thousands ad infinitum. But what if learning arithmetic was as confusing a process as learning to read? Imagine how much more difficult learning to count would be if a student had to deal with the concept of lowercase numbers and uppercase numbers, manuscript numbers and cursive numbers, long numbers and short numbers, compound numbers, number demons, contracted numbers, and numbers that were entirely different in value but were pronounced the same. To carry the analogy one step further, imagine how frustrating it could be to learn to add or subtract the simplest of numbers if numbers changed their value depending on the position in a configuration, as happens with alphabetical symbols. If these kinds of inconsistencies and misdirection happened with our arithmetic symbols, we might have fewer math majors around, and perhaps fewer modern inventions and conveniences as well.

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT ENGLISH ORTHOGRAPHY

Looking at the difficulties of English spelling, with all those multiple spellings for phonemes, one might be tempted to agree with Mario Pei. But now that we've glimpsed the dark side, let's explore the bright side of English spelling. Looking closely, one can begin to see the silver lining. One study (Furness 1990), for example, showed that in a sampling of 3,000 basic words 85 percent are spelled with complete regularity—that is, each sound is spelled with the same letter(s) in every word every time it appears. Prior to that study researchers (Hanna et al. 1966) received a government grant to attempt to determine just how phonemic English spelling is. They programmed a computer with all the phonemic spelling rules they knew of and had the computer apply the rules to 17,000 of the most common words in English. Except in cases of human error in programming, the computer managed to spell almost all the words correctly.

Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence Table for English

Phoneme	Graphemes	Examples
1. /ă/ (cat)	a, ai, al, au,	cat (96%), plait, calf, laugh
2. /ā/ (make)	a, a–e, ay, ai, aigh, e, ea, ee, ei, eigh, ey	able (45%), take (35%), play, train, straight, forte, great, melee, eight, they
3. /âr/ (care)	are, ai, ay, e, ea,	care (23%), fair (21%), prayer, there, wear
4. /ä/ (father)	a, ah, al, e, ea,	father (89%), shah, palm, sergeant, hearth
5. /b/ (box)	b, bb, pb	big (97%), rubber, cupboard
6. /ch/ (chair)	c, ch, tch, te, ti, tu, cz	cello (31%), chest (55%), match, righteous, attention, nature, Czech
7. /d/ (dog)	d, ed, dd, ld,	dot (98%), mailed, madder, could
8. /ĕ/ (bet)	e, a, ai, ay, ea, eo, ie, u	end (91%), many, said, says, head, leopard, friend, bury
9. /ē/ tree	e, ea, ee, ei, eo, ey, i, ie, oe, y	me (70%), leap (10%), meet (10%), receive, people, key, piano, grief, amoeba, city
10. /f/ (fat)	f, fe, ff, gh, lf, ph, ft	fall (78%), rife, sniff, enough, half, photograph, often
11. /g/ (go)	g, gg, gh, gu, gue	got (88%), slugger, ghetto, guard, vague
12. /h/ (hop)	h, wh	hen (98%), who
13. /hw/ (why)	wh	when (100%)
14. /ĭ/ (in)	i, y, a, e, ee, i, ia, ie, o, u, ui	pill (66%), hymn (23%), village, been, win, carriage, sieve, women, busy, guilty
15. /ī/ (eye)	i–e, y, ai, ay, ei, ey, ie, igh, is, uy, y, ye	mine (37%), my (14%), aisle, aye, height eying, lie, high, island, buy, sky, rye
16. /îr/ (fear)	e, ea, ee, ei, ie	here, tear, beer, weird, pier
17. /dz/ (jam)	g, j, d, dg, dge, di, ge, gg	gem (66%), jam (22%), graduation, judgment, fudge, soldier, stage, exaggerate
18. /k/ (kit)	c, k, cc, ch, ck, ke, lk, qu, que	cat (73%), kick (13%), account, school, lick, like, walk, quick, torque
19. /l/ (like)	l, ll,	like (91%), fellow
20. /m/ (more)	m, lm, mb, mm, mn	man (94%), palm, comb, grammar, hymn

Figure 2.1

21. /n/ (not)	n, gn, kn, nn, pn	no (97%), gnat, knew, inn, pneumonia
22. /ng/ (song)	ng, ngue	sing (59%), tongue
23. /ŏ/ (not)	o, a, ho, ou	hot (79%), what, honest, trough
24. /ō/ (no)	o, o–e, eau, eo, ew oa, oe, oh, oo, ou ough, ow, owe	no (73%), vote (14%), bureau, yeoman, sew, board, foe, oh, brooch, shoulder, though, low, owe
25. /ô/ (fall)	a, al, ah, au, aw, ough	all, talk, Utah, daughter, paw, though
26. /oi/ (oil)	oi, oy	noise (62%), toy (32%)
27. /ou/ (mouse)	ou, ow, ough	house (56%), now (29%), bough
28. /oo/ (cook)	oo, u, o, oul	look (31%), full (51%), woman (8%), could
29. /o͞o/ (toot)	oo, u–e, eu, ew, o, oe, ou, ough, ue, ui	boot (38%), rule (21%), rheumatic, drew, move, canoe, croup, through, blue, fruit
30. /p/ (pet)	p, pp, gh	pin (96%), happen, hiccough
31. /r/ (run)	r, rh, rr, wr	ran (97%), rhythm, marry, write
32. /s/ (sit)	s, c, ce, ps, sc, sch, ss, sc	some (73%), cent (17%), lace, psalm, scent, schism, mass, discern
33. /sh/ (ship)	ti, sh, ch ci, s, si, ss, xi	nation (53%), shop (26%), chandelier, prescient, sure, mansion, mission, anxious
34. /t/ (tent)	t, bt, ed, ght, pt, te, th, tt, tw, phth	ten (97%), debt, walked, caught, receipt, kite, Thomas, better, two, phthistic
35. /th/ (think)	th	thin (100%)
36. /th/ (the)	th	this (100%)
37. /ŭ/ (cut)	u, o, oe, oo, ou	but (86%), some, does, trouble
38. /yoo/ (use)	u, u–e, eau, eu, ew ieu, iew, ue, you	use (69%), yule (22%), beauty, feud, few, adieu, view, cue, you
39. /ûr/ (fern)	er, ir, or, our, ur	stern (40%), first (13%), work, journey, fur
40. /v/ (vine)	v, f, ph, ve	voice (99.5%), of, Stephen, gave
41. /w/ (win)	w, o, u	with (92%), one, guano
42. /y/ (yet)	y, i, j	yet (44%), onion (55%), hallelujah
43. /z/ (zip)	s, z, cz, se, ss, x, ze, zz	hers (64%), zebra (23%), czar, cruise, dessert, xylophone, daze, buzz
44. /zh/ (measure)	si, s, ge	division (44%), measure, barrage

Hanna, P. R., J. L. Hanna, R. E. Hodge, and E. H. Rudolph. 1966. *Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence as Clues to Spelling Improvement.* Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Education.

Figure 2.1 (cont'd)

When the language is viewed beyond just the surface structure, it becomes apparent a sense of order and logic exists in the various ways in which words are written. The vast majority of the alternative spellings for individual phonemes, for example, affect only a very limited number of words, and, excluding these, each phoneme usually has just one or two principal representations. And even when these rarer spellings are encountered (*kind, mind, find; night, fight, tight; cold, fold, hold*), a certain consistency in their spelling pattern makes them easier to remember. In addition, it is rare to find more than one irregular spelling in these words. Many words with the less frequent spellings (non-phonemic spellings) can either be taught later, when students' skills are more developed, or can be taught as sight words.

Getting Beyond the Surface Structure of English

Let us take a closer look at alternative spellings of phonemes in greater detail to discern the consistency that can be found. Our daily language is filled with examples of this consistency.

Consonants: In the consonant phonemes in figure 2.1, the reader might note that, with the exception of *c* and *g*, generally one consistent spelling of the sound appears most often. For example, the predominant spelling for most consonants is a single letter—*b* = *b* (97%), *n* = *n* (97%), *p* = *p* (96%), *r* = *r* (97%) (Hanna et al. 1966; Blevins 1998). Another common spelling is doubling a consonant (i.e., *rubber, inn, happen, marry*). Trying to decide whether the consonant is spelled with a single or double letter may cause problems in working out how to spell a word, but the two spellings do not misdirect pronunciation while reading. *Rubber* and *ruber, inn* and *in*, and *marry* and *mary* are pronounced the same in either spelling. Although spelling these words with a single consonant would be a mistake in spelling, it would not cause a miscue in reading. The few variations beyond these two spellings generally involve the presence of silent consonants, which are fairly consistent themselves (see below), or other letters that do not cause serious pronunciation problems.

The two other consonants *c* and *g*, both of which have two different sounds, are also quite consistent and easily learned by students. For example, when *c* is followed by *e, i,* or *y* (*cease, city, cyst*, etc.) it has the "soft" sound usually associated with *s*. When *c* is followed by *a, o,* or *u*, it has the "hard" sound usually associated with *k* (*cat, course, custom*, etc.). When *c* follows a short vowel it is generally spelled with a *ck* (*sick, clock, duck*, etc.). It seems safe to conclude, then, that the relationship between consonant phonemes and graphemes, although not always perfectly consistent, is close enough to be reliable and valuable for instruction. The same conclusion may be valid for consonant blends, as approximately 82 percent of consonant blends are spelled regularly (Furness 1990).

Vowels: The various spellings for the same vowel sound can be most confusing and frustrating at times. Yet, even with the vowels' spelling patterns, a great deal of consistency exists. In most cases, a reader can arrive at the exact or approximate pronunciation of a vowel sound from the way a word is written. Short vowels are especially reliable. Usually, when a single vowel is found in a word, it is short—*a* = *cat* (96%), *e* = *end* (91%), *i* = *pin* and *y* = *hymn* (89%), *o* = *hot* (79%), *u* = *cut* (86%) (Hanna et al. 1966; Blevins 1998). Long vowels generally are indicated by vowel digraphs or by a silent *e* at the end of the word. Within these two generalizations the spelling of long vowels is also fairly consistent. Usually, the vowel digraphs are *ai* and *ay* (*maid, say*) for the long /a/; *ee* and *ea* (keep and reach) for the long /e/; *ie* and final *y* (*tried, sky*) for the long /i/; *oa, oe,* and *ow* (*boat, toe, show*) for the long /o/; and *ue* and *ew* (*blue, threw*) for the long /u/. When the *y* is found at the end of a one-syllable word (*try, my, sky,* etc.), it is always pronounced as a long /i/. When *y* is at the end of a multisyllabic word or is used as an adverbial ending it has the sound of the long /e/ (*handy, funny, windy, nicely,* etc.).

Diphthongs and vowel digraphs: These elements of English spelling are also fairly consistent. Take for example the *oi* sound as in *oil* and *boil* and the *oy* sound as in *boy* and *joy*—two spellings for the same sound. Upon examination it is noted that the *oi* spelling most often appears in a closed syllable (inside the word), and the *oy* spelling appears as an open syllable (at the end)—*toil, coin, voice; boy, ploy, soy,* etc. The same is true of *au* and *aw*. Generally, the *au* spelling appears in a closed syllable (*daughter, Paul, autumn,* etc.), and *aw* is found at the end of a word (*saw, claw, straw,* etc.). There are two spellings for *ou, ow,* yet only one sound. As in the previous examples, the spelling *ou* (*house, mouse, blouse,* etc.) is generally within the word, and the spelling *ow* (*how, now, cow,* etc.) is generally at the end of the word.

Silent letters: Although most silent letters in English serve little purpose other than to confuse and misdirect reading and spelling, they do nonetheless have a certain consistency and order about them, so that they cause little difficulty for an advanced reader and speller. Notice that although the letters are silent, they are generally located at the same spot in the word and with the same neighboring letters (see figure 2.2).

Silent Letters and Their Positions

silent a	silent b	silent d	silent g	silent gh
head	bomb	edge	gnat	fight
learn	climb	ledge	gnome	light
bread	comb	fudge	gnu	right
deaf	lamb	hedge	gnaw	sight
silent k	**silent l**	**silent h**	**silent t**	**silent w**
knock	half	hour	soften	write
knit	calf	honor	often	wrong
know	palms	ghastly	castle	wrist
knife	calm	ghost	bustle	wrap

Figure 2.2

LACK OF BARRIERS TO READING COMPREHENSION

One thing to remember is that even though reading and spelling are considered opposite sides of the same coin (one side is decoding, the other is encoding), they are not the same as far as ease of learning goes. When a child is learning to read and does not immediately recognize the word, he or she can use the letters to "sound out" the word and finally figure it out. The word *sneeze*, for example, could just as easily be written as *sneese, snease, sneaze, sneize*, or *sneaze*, and it would still be pronounced the same with the same meaning.

In some ways the irregularity of spelling can be an aid in sight reading because it helps students learn words as configurations, rather than sounds. Many young learners, for example, learn to read many high-frequency words such as *does, was, the, love*, etc., before they come to school or have learned anything about letter sounds. They learn to read these words not by the process of sounding them out, but rather by a natural and untaught process of simply recognizing them as the regular and "normal" representation. As the child learns to read more and more words, he or she increasingly represses the sounds and begins to look at words more for their meaning. Learning and

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experiencing various spellings of the same sounds in words, the child is better able to recognize words at a more advanced stage, getting sounds and meaning simultaneously.

In the reading process, getting to the exact pronunciation is not as important as getting to the exact spelling is when writing. The general context of the sentence, paragraph, and story helps guide the student to the right pronunciation. If a young reader encounters the sentence, "Father parked his car in the garage," and is having a hard time figuring out what "garage" means, he or she can get close enough to the pronunciation by trying to sound it out. A good chance exists that by the process of trying to sound it out in the context of the total sentence, the reader will come close enough to the exact pronunciation to eventually get it right. If all else fails, the reader can often figure out the meaning of the strange word using the words around it and the sense of the sentence. In the example, the reader can try to sound out the word and/or reason that the place where one parks a car is a garage.

The bottom line is that while variations in how words are written are a cause of concern and frustration at times, they are not of necessity a barrier to reading comprehension.

ORDER OF TEACHING PHONOLOGICAL SKILL

As students, even in the same grade or age level, have widely differing reading abilities, it is difficult to determine the exact order in which a particular skill ought to be taught for each student. About all that can be said is that, generally, or for the average student at least, most phonics instruction will be completed by the end of the third grade or beginning of the fourth. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that the more complicated concepts, such as the meaning of particular prefixes and suffixes and the segmentation of longer words, often continue to be taught in the later elementary grades and beyond. For purposes of remediation much of the content of phonetic instruction may be reviewed, or learned, at a later grade level—including adult education programs, if necessary.

Since all learning should be geared to meet individual or classroom needs, it's impossible to set out an exact order or sequence for teaching phonics in all cases. In theory, however, there is a logical and desirable procedure that starts with the most familiar and goes on to the less familiar, that proceeds from the simpler to the more complex. Provided students have already developed a

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satisfactory degree of skill in auditory and visual discrimination and have learned to recognize at least a few basic sight words, the following order of presenting phonological awareness is suggested.

Phonological Sequencing of Instruction

A. Consonants: "closed-mouth" sounds; letters of the alphabet that are not vowels.

1. Consonants that have one main sound (*b, d, f, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q(u) r, t, v, w, y, z*)
2. Consonants that have two sounds (*c, g,* and *s*)
3. Ending consonant sounds
4. Phonograms: letter groupings that have the same sound in many words, usually a vowel sound plus a consonant sound that, added to a consonant or blend, make a new word (*-ake*: *take, make, lake,* etc.; *-ang: sang, rang, clang,* etc.)
5. Consonant digraphs: two consecutive consonants that form a single unique sound (*ch, gh, ph (f), sh, th, wh*)
6. Consonant blends: two or three consecutive consonants that form a new blended sound (initial blends: *bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, sl, br, cr, dr, fr, gr, pr, tr, sc, sk, sl, sm, sn, sp, st, sw, dw, sw, tw, scr, shr, squ, spl, str, thr;* ending blends: *-bl, -ct, -ft, -ld, -lf, -lk, -lm, -lp, -lt, -mp, -nc, -nch, -nd, -ng, -nk, -nt, -pl, -pt, -rd, -rg, -rk, -rl, -rm, -rn, -rs, -rt, -sk, -sp, -st, -tl*)
7. Silent consonants: consonants that are not heard in certain words or combinations of letters (*duck, sign, honest, high,* etc.)

B. Vowels: "opened-mouth" letters of the alphabet that are not consonants. The letters *a, e, i, o,* and *u* are always vowels. *W* and *y* produce vowel sounds when they follow another vowel (*law, new, how; say, key, toy,* etc.). When *y* is the only vowel in a word (*try, my, sky,* etc.) or the only vowel in a syllable (*funny, July, mystery,* etc.), then it is a vowel.

1. Short vowel sounds: vowels that are low in tone and take a short time to pronounce
2. Long vowel sounds: vowels that are high in tone and take a longer time to pronounce

3. Rules for determining whether a vowel is long or short
4. *R*-controlled vowels: a vowel followed by *r*; has a special sound different from the one usually associated with that vowel (*her, corn, girl, fur,* etc.)
5. Vowel digraphs: two vowels together that produce one vowel sound (*leaf, foe, build, piece, zoom,* etc.)
6. Vowel diphthongs: formed when two vowels come together to produce a new single sound unlike short or long vowel sounds (*boy, join, cow, proud, snow,* etc.)
7. Miscellaneous vowel sounds (*moon, shoot, book, cause, salt, candy,* etc.)

C. Syllabication: dividing words into syllables in order to sound out the words

1. Rules for diving words into syllables (*V* stands for vowel; *C* stands for consonant):
    a. VC-CV: *rab-bit, tor-ment, pret-zel, let-ter, suf-fix,* etc.
    b. V-CV: *ma-jor, be-gin, lo-cal, ba-by, po-lice,* etc.
    c. VC-V: *doz-en, lem-on, col-or, riv-er, hab-it,* etc.
    d. *-ble:* final syllable constituted by the endings *-ble, -cle, -dle, -gle, -kle, -ple, -tle,* and *-zle*
2. Prefixes and suffixes: syllables placed at the beginning and ending of words to change their meaning, generally counted as syllables by themselves and, as such, excluded from the syllables of the root word (*un/fit, re/do, poor/ly, good/ness,* etc.)
3. Compound words: two words together that form a new word (*sunshine, butterfly, moonlight, football,* etc.)
4. Contractions: shortened forms of two words written as one (*I'd, can't, don't, it's, you'll,* etc.)
5. Inflectional endings: additions to the end of a word to change time or tense of a verb (*look, looks, looked*) or the quantity (number) of a noun (*boy–boys, glove–gloves, rose–roses,* etc.)

CONCLUSION

It would be like living in an educational dreamworld if English orthography were as consistent as Portuguese, Italian, German, and most other languages where a greater conformity exists between sound and symbol, or phoneme and grapheme.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, if after students had learned the symbols and sounds, they would be able to pronounce each word they see with one hundred percent accuracy? The heck with whole language, invented spelling, miscue analysis, and all the other innovated and created methods. Just teach the letter sounds and students will, with a minimum of practice, automatically learn to pronounce words. No more memorization of generalizations, no more repetitive drills or exercises, no more stumbling over words.

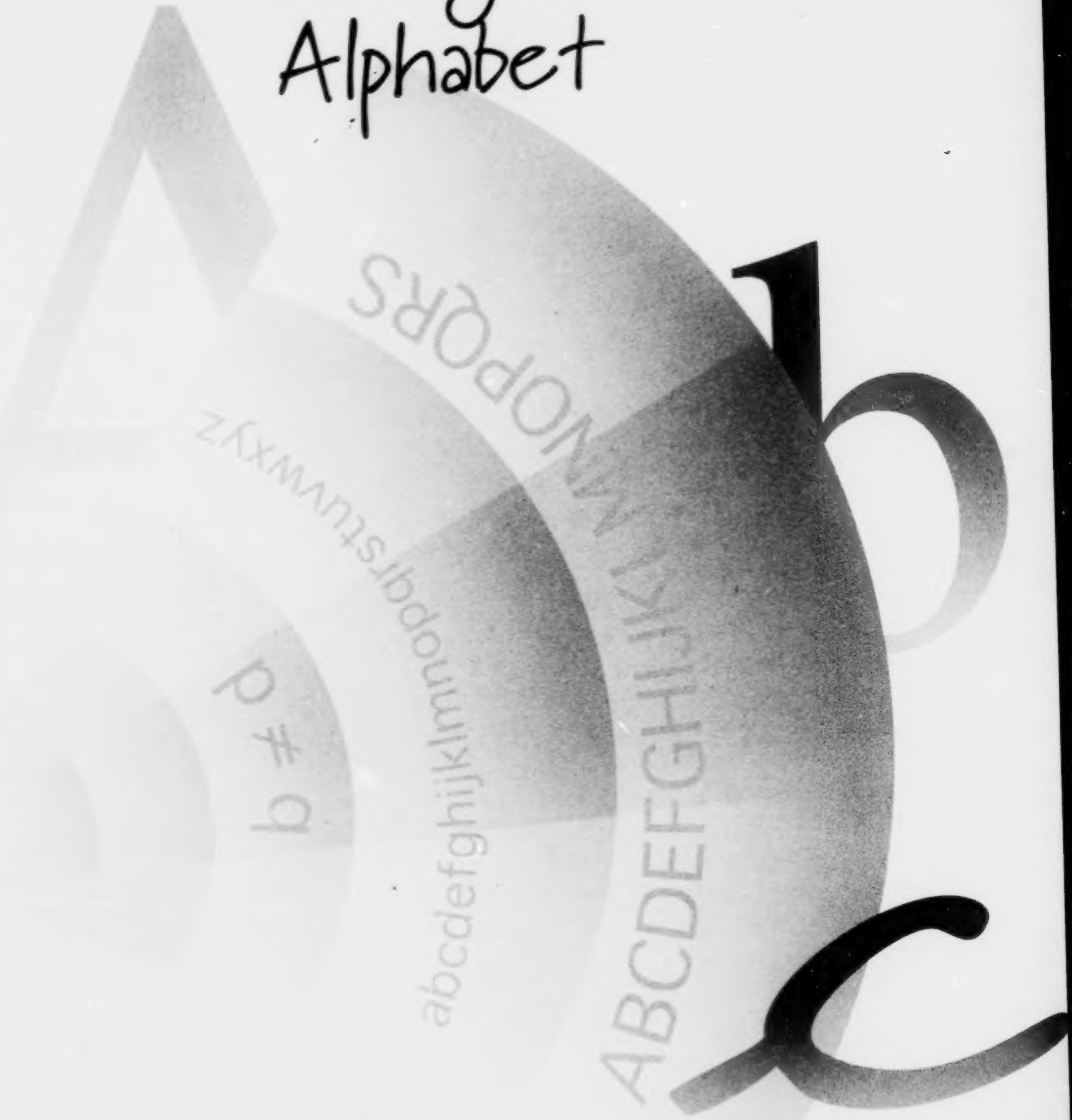
After such wishful dreaming comes the reality that the student and teacher must deal with English the way it is, not the way they wish it would be. The reality, however, isn't all that bad. English orthography, or the way words are written and spelled, isn't perfect, far from it, but it doesn't have to be perfect to be learned. The system has a great deal of consistency and logic and, if presented correctly, it can be easily learned by almost every student in the elementary grades.

It is because of all the intricacies of English that the teacher must use a variety of approaches and techniques to get the lesson across. It is because of these intricacies that reading classes should never be boring or routine.

The good news is that, although English writing may more difficult to encode than other orthographies, it has some benefits that other more structured orthographies do not. For example, English is not encumbered with whole sets of conjugations, declensions, and inflectional endings that so challenge learners of other languages. English has no prescribed word order, so there is greater freedom and variety of expression. English not only has the largest vocabulary of any language in the world, a single word can have dozens of different meanings depending on its use in the sentence. English is the language of navigation, aviation, television, and the movies. It is the second language of many countries of the world and the closest thing we have to an international language. English has so many good things going for it that the sometimes annoying repetitions young learners have to put up with when learning to read are well worth it.

Chapter 3

Teaching the Alphabet


A
b
c
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRS
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
b ≠ d

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Many children ages two, three, and four must feel like they live in a world of letters. The boy next door, Blake, is one of these. The walls of his bedroom are decorated with large multicolored letters of various sizes and shapes. In the center of his bedroom hangs a huge ABC mobile, which glows in the dark. Next to the nightstand lays his ABC telephone, which toots its approval when the proper letter button is pushed. Scattered in the middle of the room and unto the far corners lay groupings of alphabet blocks. In the bookcase are alphabet books of all sizes and colors. Even when nature calls, it's off to the alphabet-ringed potty chair. And how many times has Blake been paraded out to sing the "elemeno" song, not only for family, but for everyone else within earshot? All these modern conveniences are provided by my progressive neighbor for the worthy purpose of making sure Blake gets off to a good start in school.

For every Blake, however, an equal number of children come to school with little or no exposure to books or reading material. One study, for example, pointed out that sixty percent of the youngsters who did poorly in school didn't own a single book (Feitelson and Goldstein 1986). Another study showed that while the typical middle-class child enters first grade with approximately 1,000 hours of being read to, children from lower-income families average just 25 hours (Adams 1998). And at every income level and in every type of family situation, one encounters children who are encouraged to sit passively in front of the television for hours a day. This does not bode well for getting off to a good start in reading.

Kindergarten and first-grade classrooms are a composite of boys and girls, ranging from those who are highly motivated and eager to learn to those who have no motivation at all. "They come to school with literacy experiences that range from zero to 2,000 hours" (California State Board of Education 1996, 19). Some come already able to read at the primer level, others can't tell one letter from another. Some children can write many words from memory using lowercase letters, others are not sure how to hold a pencil. All these very fragile youngsters—those who are well prepared and those who are not—will need special handling, inspiration, and role modeling by the teacher. The task of getting all these children off to a good start is the tremendous challenge of the kindergarten or first-grade teacher, and one that will more than likely determine the child's educational future. More than anything else the child's engagement and participation in learning will be dependent on the atmosphere—the momentum, support, and expectations—created by their first classroom teachers (Adams 1998, commenting on Chall's 1967 study of over

300 classrooms). For this reason alone there are no more important teachers than the ones who start it all.

WHY LEARNING THE ALPHABET IS IMPORTANT

English, like Spanish, German, and most of the other major languages of the world, is an alphabetical language. The letters of the alphabet are abstract symbols, made up of various forms and shapes, that stand for the sounds of the language. When these symbols are written together, they form written or printed words. When they are read together, they form spoken words. The manner in which words are consistently written enables a relationship to be established between the visual capacities of the reader and his or her auditory/oral capacities. The manner in which words are consistently spelled allows one person to communicate with another through the written word. Learning the letters and sounds of the alphabet and being able to use them in written communications is one of the bases upon which an educated society is predicated.

Learning the alphabet is the first formal step in education. It has always been considered the school's most important task and the foundation of all the other subjects in school (Smith 1986). This fact has been recognized from earliest times. In Colonial days, for example, every child entering school had to memorize the stanza below.

> He who will never learn his ABC
> Will forever a blockhead be. (Gray 1963, 45)

Although you would never hear the verse in classrooms today, it does hold a grain of truth. If students fail to learn the alphabet, they won't have much chance to go very far in education. They may not "a blockhead be" but they certainly will feel like one. Until children learn the form and shape of individual letters they cannot begin to start reading or writing words. Until children learn the individual sounds of the letters, they will have difficulty with more involved aspects of reading. Research indicates that the single best predictor of early success in reading is accurate, rapid identification of the upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet. The second best indicator is phonemic awareness—the awareness of smaller units of sound within spoken words (Adams 1998). In all the language arts areas—reading, spelling, and writing—knowledge and mastery of the alphabet is the prerequisite for achievement and success.

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In its reading initiative publication, *Teaching Reading*, the California State Board of Education recognizes the value of learning the alphabet as a first step in learning to read. It states:

1. Until children can quickly recognize letters, they cannot begin to appreciate that all words are made up of sequences and patterns of letters.
2. Until children can comfortably discriminate the shape of one letter from another there is no point in teaching letter-sound pairings.
3. Knowledge of the letter names is important for it has been shown to be a major means by which children recall or generate sounds of letters in their independent reading and writing (California State Board of Education 1996, 5).

The California report goes on to stress that since the names and shapes of the letters are similar to each other, learning them is best fostered through playful exposure to the alphabet. It also encourages prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to expose their students to names, shapes, and formation of the letters of the alphabet (California State Board of Education 1996).

DIFFICULTIES OF LEARNING THE LETTERS

Learning the symbol system doesn't come naturally to children. They must learn the names of the letters in order and out of order, associate sounds to the letters, write the letters, put the letters together to form words, and put the words into sentences. Although many children come to school able to sing the alphabet song, write some of the letters of the alphabet, and read a few words, kindergarten will not necessarily be easy for them. There is so much more to learning the alphabet than mere recitation.

Learning the alphabet is difficult for many students for two principal reasons. In the first place, kindergarten students are just learning how to learn and may not be ready to process the vast amount of new knowledge and experiences to which they have suddenly become exposed. The second reason is the complexities and inconsistencies of the alphabet itself.

The Shapes and Forms of Letters

When children enter school, so much is expected of them. In addition to learning the forms of the letters, they will need extra practice distinguishing letters that have similar forms or shapes. Children have already learned to recognize things by their size and shape. A car is a car whether it is viewed from the front or back. A book is a book whether it's upside down or not. When it comes to learning the letters, however, new perceptions are necessary. When the *d* is turned, it becomes a *b;* when the *M* is upside down, it becomes a *W.* Many subtle changes in letters also make them difficult to distinguish one from the other. The lowercase *b* and *d* often are confused with the lowercase *a* if the horizontal line of the *a* is not elevated enough (α). The lowercase *g* and *q* (g q), *m* and *n* (m n), and *a* and *o* (a o) are also often difficult to distinguish and are sometimes confused one for the other. The uppercase letters *T, E,* and *F* also have identification problems. When the student learns cursive handwriting in a year or two, again there will be another long period of transition when words are often spelled or written with a mixture of the manuscript and cursive forms. Often this mixture lasts into adult life and becomes the normal or usual way of writing.

Learning the alphabet for some students represents the same level of difficulty as an adult attempting to learn Chinese for the first time. Unlike in Chinese, one of the few nonalphabetic languages, children soon learn that there are at least four different ways in which individual English letters can be represented or written—the uppercase and lowercase manuscript letters, and then some time later, the upper- and lowercase cursive letters. The word, *the,* for example, can be written or viewed in the following ways: THE, The, the, The, the, The. When one considers all the different typefaces and the wide variety in styles of handwriting, making out individual letters and words can become a confusing task, especially for children who may not have had experience or exposure to all the variations. It seems logical to conclude that when the visual patterns presented to children are inconsistent and confusing, chances are very good they will have a more difficult time in forming the necessary associations between the sound and symbol as well.

New Ideas and Concepts

Overcoming these kinds of confusing problems regarding the form and shape of letters is only the beginning, however. Once students get over these novel aspects of learning the letters, they are slowly introduced to a whole set of other new ideas and concepts about letters that also must be learned and mastered. Here are a few of them.

1. In reality, 52 (not 26) letters have to be learned, considering each letter has two forms—uppercase (capital) and lowercase. It is no help to

discover that some of the lowercase letters are smaller versions of the uppercase letters (*C–c, V–v, X–x*), while most of the lowercase letters have no resemblance to their uppercase forms (*D–d, E–e, G–g*).

2. The two forms are not interchangeable. Sometimes only small letters must be used and other times a capital letter is required. To put an uppercase letter where a lowercase one is required, or vice versa, is a misspelling.
3. There are two types of letters—vowels and consonants. Both have different functions in words. Vowels are further divided into long and short, with no sure way of telling the difference from appearance and position alone.
4. Each form of the letter must be remembered in order and identified out of order.
5. Letters stand for sounds, but the sounds can vary as words vary.
6. Letters make up words and words make up sentences.
7. After having spent hours and hours learning the manuscript alphabet, students must then turn around and learn a totally new way of writing the alphabet in another year or two.

Is it any wonder, then, that so many children have such a difficult time learning and retaining necessary information about the alphabet? This is especially true since so many of them have little or no preschool training or experience with identifying and writing the letters. The problems are even greater and more involved when so many children are entering school with almost no knowledge of, and little experience with, speaking English.

When students enter the kindergarten room for the first time they find it, like Blake's bedroom, full of reminders of just how important the alphabet is. Large colorful alphabet cards usually line the front of the room. Alphabet picture books are often found on the bookshelf. Among the everyday activities, students learn to sing the alphabet, dance to the alphabet, and clap to the alphabet. They learn to point to the letters, trace the letters, cut out the letters, color the letters, arrange the letters, and write the letters. The kindergarten teacher often reads book after book and uses trick after trick to help all her students learn the letters of the alphabet, as well as good listening and reading skills. Following up on the efforts of the kindergarten teacher, the first grade teacher uses another bag of tricks to ensure that students master the sounds of the letters by creating opportunities and activities for them to further develop their alphabetical skills. After two years of this kind of exposure, if a student is still having difficulty with learning the alphabet, additional activities and workbook exercises on the sounds of the letters are reinforced and reviewed over and over again in the second and third grades—and beyond, if necessary. It is safe to say that probably more time and energy is spent teaching the alphabet than any other single endeavor in school.

Yet, despite all the time, effort, and emphasis placed on teaching the alphabet, it is amazing the number of second graders, fifth graders, and even high school students who cannot recite all the letters in proper order, associate sounds with letters, or write all the letters of the alphabet. It is discouraging how many upper elementary students, despite all previous efforts to the contrary, still reverse letters, confuse one letter with another, or mix manuscript and cursive letters together. The author has confronted this situation repeatedly over years of teaching reading. One of the most baffling questions some early elementary teachers must ask themselves is why, despite all their efforts, so many of children fail to learn or retain fundamental knowledge of the alphabet. Times have changed, that's true. Children and their attitudes have changed, that's true. But the urgent need to know and master the alphabet has not changed—that's also true. The challenge is to find ways to assure that all children in school learn and master the alphabet.

Attempts to Change the Alphabet

It is precisely because of the peculiar difficulties of the English alphabet that scholars, writers, lexicographers, and statesmen such as Benjamin Franklin, Noah Webster, Isaac Pitman, George Bernard Shaw, and many others over the centuries have made proposals to change the alphabet in some degree or another (Starrett 1981).

Many educators over the years have devised systems to make it easier for students to decode words. In 1960, for example, Helen Bonnema, a high school principal in Denver, Colorado, invented a system for prereading instruction in kindergarten and first grade. The system, among other things, used phonetic respelling of many words (*kwik–quick, hed–head, lau–law*) and used diacritical marks to denote long vowels (kē, plā, gōst, jū). She added the inverted e (ə) for the schwa sound (Bonnema 1961). Harry Lindgren, president of the Action Spelling Society, with headquarters in Australia, in 1969 advocated using spelling changes and diacritical marks to indicate vowel length. Several books were published with many of his changes (Starrett 1981).

Other educators have resorted to colors to indicate vowel sounds. One of the earliest attempts appeared in the Dale Readers at the turn of the twentieth century. The color coding system that received the greatest amount of notoriety was *Words in Color* by Caleb Gattegno in 1962. Gattegno believed that 280 signs would be needed to represent the 47 sounds of English. Instead of using new signs or symbols, he chose to use distinct colors to represent these sounds because the colors "would not disturb the shape of the image which the words create in the mind of the learner" (Gattegno 1962, 2). The most famous reading program using an augmented alphabet was the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i. t. a.) of James Pitman. The alphabet contained 45 characters or symbols to represent the 45 phonemes of English. They were all written in one form so that capital letters were merely larger forms of the small letters. Digraphs were written as one letter both in spacing and shape. This alphabet was not intended as a permanent reform, but was used in the initial stages of reading to assist students in reading. Once students gained fluency in reading, they were gradually introduced to standard spellings of words. Pitman's system gained wide recognition and success in the United Kingdom. In 1963 i/ t/ a (as distinguished from i. t. a., the English version) was introduced in the United States in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The program spread rather quickly. In a few years over 3,000 students in seven states were using i /t / a in the initial stages of reading. The evaluations were somewhat mixed, and i/ t/ a soon died from lack of enthusiasm (Starrett 1981).

Although good intentions and great ingenuity have abounded, so far nobody has invented an alternate English alphabet that has found broad acceptance. It seems as though for the moment we must accept our challenging orthography as it is and concentrate on finding the most effective ways to teach it to children.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEANINGFUL PRACTICE AND REPETITION

For most students the arduous task of learning the forms and sounds of the letters takes a great deal of individual attention, repetition, and practice. The need for repetition and practice, however, doesn't mean simply doing the task over the same way every time, with the implied message: "You'll sit here all day until you get it right!" It simply means that parents and educators have to use different means and activities—or whatever it takes to make learning and mastering the alphabet as meaningful and rewarding as possible. Variety, with

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a little bit of patience and praise thrown into the mix, can go a long way toward making repetitive tasks rewarding for the teacher and student.

The *Guide to the California Reading Initiative of 1996* points out several important considerations teachers ought to be aware of when teaching the alphabet. It suggests the following:

- Teach upper- and lowercase letters separately.
- Begin with uppercase letters in preschool. Since the ability to read lowercase letters is more important for teaching reading text, it may be wiser to emphasize lowercase letters when working with first graders who have a little letter knowledge.
- Incorporate printing into instruction in letters as a powerful means of developing letter recognition.
- Use letter/keyword/picture displays when introducing letter-sound instruction (California State Board of Education 1996).

WHEN TO REMEDIATE

One thing that must be remembered is that most reading problems don't begin in the second or third grade. Most reading problems have their origin much earlier—in preschool and kindergarten. Formal reading instruction begins with learning the alphabet and how to reproduce the letters, and associating sounds with these letters. If for some reason the students don't learn the names of the letters or cannot associate sounds with letters, they will not have much success with other facets of reading. Getting off to a good start in reading builds up a student's confidence and eagerness to attempt more advanced learning. Confidence is the name of the game when it comes to reading and most other aspects of life. Students who have no confidence in their reading endeavors will start to fall further and further behind.

One of the criteria for remedial reading programs in the past was that the student had to be at least two grade levels behind before he or she could receive special help. This meant most programs were filled with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. In many cases it was too little too late. Research indicates that if schools delay intervention programs until age seven, 75 percent of remedial students will continue to have difficulties. If reading problems are identified as early as the first or second grade they can be remedied 82 percent of the time. On the other hand, if the school waits until third, fourth, or fifth grade to intervene, the problems can be remedied only 46 percent of the time

(Adams 1998). In other words, early identification of reading problems and subsequent intervention is almost twice as effective as later identification and intervention.

Fortunately, today, school districts have recognized the need for early intervention. Students who are at risk of failing to read are now identified in kindergarten and first grade and given special help before their reading problems have reached the critical stages. The Reading Task Force in California emphasizes the need for early intervention: "Schools must have an effective, rigorous, proven intervention program as part of their comprehensive literacy plan for instruction, with emphasis on early intervention for children by mid-first grade" (California State Board of Education 1996, 20).

ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING THE ALPHABET

There are many profitable ways of involving young children in activities for learning to identify the names, shapes, and sounds of the alphabet. The very best source for learning just what ideas and activities are most effective is to talk to the real experts, experienced classroom teachers. If they have been around for a while they generally have a wealth of ideas and love to share them with other teachers. Below are some of the popular activities teachers use to assist students in learning the alphabet.

ACTIVITY Alphabet Song

Since so many children already come to school knowing how to sing the alphabet song, this is a good place to get them all started. Let those who know the song teach it to those who do not. Once the students learn the song, several additional activities fit in nicely and can be incorporated into the song.

- Write the letters of the alphabet on the blackboard. As the students sing the song have one student volunteer to point to the individual letters as each is mentioned.
- Make large (9 × 12) letters of the alphabet out of construction paper or poster board. On one side is the uppercase letter; on the other side is the lowercase letter. Mix up the cards and pass them out to members of the class. As the song is sung, have each student hold up their letter as it is named.

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- Make large (9 × 12) letters of the alphabet out of construction paper or poster board. Mix up the letters and pass them out to members of the class. As the song is sung *slowly* (very slowly at first), have the student with the first letter run to the front of the room; as *B* is mentioned, have the student with that letter come forward and stand next to *A*—and so on. This activity will probably cause lots of confusion, especially at the beginning, but it also causes much laughter and enjoyment. Not recommended for teachers who require a lot of order and formality.

ACTIVITY Alphabet Box

Each student is asked to find a small plastic container with a top or a small box the size of a half-pint milk carton. For each student in the class, the teacher reproduces the alphabet on twenty-six 1 × 1.5-inch construction paper or poster board rectangles with the lowercase letters on one side and the corresponding uppercase letters on the other. These alphabet boxes can be used for a variety of purposes, including

- Identifying vowels and consonants
- Making simple words
- Making simple sentences
- Examples of letters to be copied

ACTIVITY The Alphabet Race

A game students love to play with their cards is called the Alphabet Race. Have the class shake up their boxes so that all the letters are well mixed. Ask them to arrange the letters on their desk in alphabetical order. One time they will do it with uppercase letters and another time it will be the lowercase letters. The first student to finish the task correctly becomes the alphabet king or queen for that day. Other students who finish within the allotted time may receive stickers or praise as an incentive. Those who are having difficulty competing may be praised for progress or be allowed to work at their own pace in a noncompetitive atmosphere.

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ACTIVITY Word Box

The word box is similar to the alphabet box except that it contains words instead of letters. The teacher starts by selecting high-frequency words such as *a, look, but, can, do, good,* etc., and reproducing them for the class on heavy paper or poster board. The teacher then passes out several words a day to each student for learning. Students are encouraged to add their own words to the box. Words that are encountered in reading or spelling, plus common nouns and verbs, may also be added. As the words mount up, students should gather enough to begin to make sentences on their desks or on flash cards. Other uses include alphabetizing words, identifying letters or sounds in words, and identifying subject and verb, nouns, and so on.

ACTIVITY Tongue Twisters

Teachers can help students identify sounds of the letters by associating each sound with a make-believe character, i.e. *Billy Butler* for *b*, *Queen Quilla* for *q*, and *Talkative Ted* for *t*. Children also enjoy memorizing and reciting strange sentences or tongue twisters. Both these concepts come together in the following sample tongue twisters for consonants.

- *Billy Butler* badly burned his bacon burgers.
- *Goofy guys* go ga ga over girls.
- *Lonely Lucy Long* laughs little lately.
- *Queen Quilla* quit quilting quality quilts.
- *Seven silly sisters* sang several silly songs.
- *Talkative Ted* told ten terrible tales.
- *Ziggy the zebra* "zigzags" in the zoo.

ACTIVITY Letter Search

The teacher passes out a page from a newspaper or magazine and asks the students to find a certain letter on the page and circle the word in which they found it. Usually the teacher will limit the number of words to five or ten and then go on to a new letter. One variation is to ask students to start at the top of the page and find the letter *a* in a word and circle it. From there, they look for the letter *b*, circle it, keep going in search of *c*, and so on, going as far through the alphabet as possible in the allotted time. Later on, students could search the newspapers for certain vowel digraphs or blends, silent letters, prefixes, two-letter words, six-letter words, etc.

ACTIVITY Student ABC Books

As students are learning the sound of an individual letter, talk to them about how to make their own alphabet book. Pass out a large sheet of heavyweight construction paper. Have each student print a rather large letter in upper- and lowercase at the top of the page. Ask students to fill out the rest of the page with words that start with that letter or pictures of things whose name starts with that letter. As they encounter words in reading and spelling they are encouraged to add these words to the page and draw a picture to represent each word. As students learn more letters, they may create pages for each new letter and begin to assemble the pages with some kind of binding. At times these pages can also be displayed on the walls of the classroom or in the school hallway.

Making an ABC book is an ongoing project that may last the whole year. As students continue to add new words and pictures to their books, they may add additional pages as the need arises. After all the letters are introduced, the teacher may take one page from each student and make a classroom ABC Book.

CONCLUSION

It is not an exaggeration to say that in the process of learning to read, the ability to identify letter names and sounds and to reproduce these letters holds the key to success or failure for most students. Research over the years heavily supports the importance of learning the alphabet as a first formal step in learning to read. For example, researchers have come to the following conclusions:

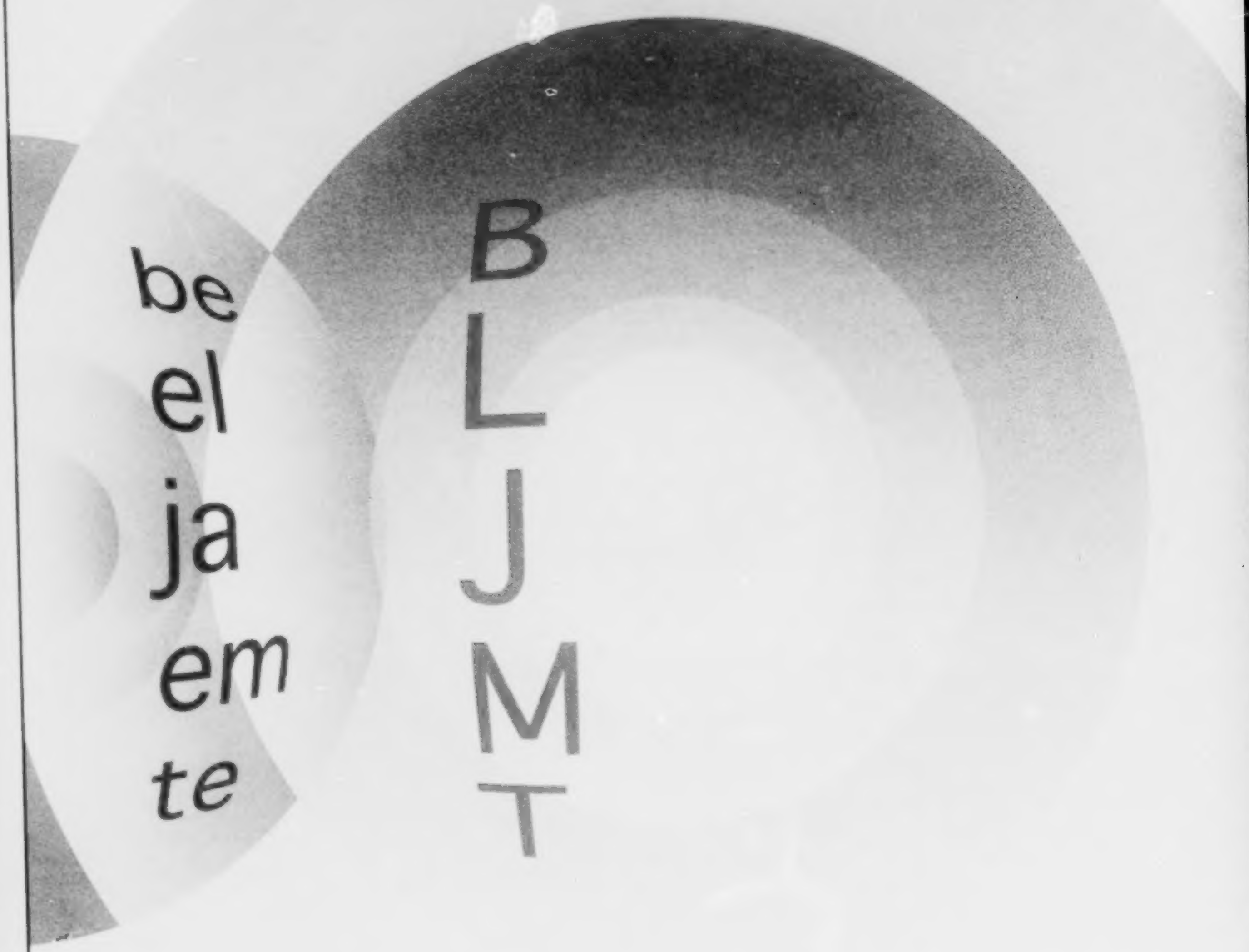
- Knowing the names of the letters is one of the best indicators of success in reading (Chall 1967).
- The single best indicator of early reading achievement is accurate, rapid identification of upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet. The second best indicator is phonemic awareness. (Adams 1998).
- The ability to name and recognize upper- and lowercase letters accounted for 25 to 36 percent of the variation in reading ability at the end of the first year, regardless of the method used to teach reading (Bond and Dykstra 1967).

- "Until children can comfortably discriminate the shape of one letter from another, there is no point in teaching letter-sound pairings" (California State Board of Education 1996, 5).

Since learning the letters and sounds of the alphabet generally occurs before a child enters school or in kindergarten and first grade, it is natural to believe that once students get into later grades they know how to write the letters. This is not always the case. Based on years of experience working with children who have reading and spelling problems, this writer suggests that parents and teachers of students who are struggling begin by finding out whether the student can identify and reproduce the letters in good form and order. In many of these cases, the alphabet is the starting point of the solution.

Chapter 4

Teaching Consonants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The alphabet we use to write the English language is divided into two categories: consonants and vowels. Although almost every schoolchild is able to recite the alphabet and distinguish vowels from consonants, very few adults are able to explain the difference between the two. Vowels are defined as those sounds that pass freely and unrestricted through the mouth, and consonants are defined as those that are made by touching parts of the mouth or lips to each other.

DISTINGUISHING CONSONANTS AND VOWELS

The easiest way to explain the difference between consonants and vowels for students is have them say the letters aloud so that they can actually feel what is happening in the mouth. A good teaching strategy is to ask students to say the letter names of the vowels several times aloud and in rapid succession: *A A A A A, E E E E E,* etc. They should be able to note and feel that, although the tongue moves to different positions for each vowel, it never obstructs the flow of air. Next, have students repeat the sounds of the consonant letters several times: *B B B B B, M M M M M, T T T T T,* etc. Students should be able to feel how the sound of each letter is restricted or obstructed by the tongue or lips. They will notice that air cannot escape without causing friction, which is heard differently for each letter. For teachers who wish to explore consonants in greater detail for themselves, figure 4.1 lists the types of consonants.

WHY TEACH CONSONANTS FIRST?

Although some reading authorities disagree about whether it is better to begin formalized reading instruction with vowels or consonants, most feel it is generally easier to start with the consonants. There are at least three good reasons to start with consonant sounds that appear at the beginning of the word—in the initial position.

The first is that the majority of the words the student encounters in beginning reading programs begin with consonants (*dog, go, stop, run, mom,* etc.). In the *Developmental Word List* developed by Edward Fry in 1995, for example, 156 of the 192 words listed begin with consonants. Another author points out that only 18 of the most common five hundred nouns found in reading material for the early elementary grades begin with vowels (Blevins 1998, 149).

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Types of Consonants

Without going into great detail regarding the mechanics of how consonant sounds are reproduced, they can be categorized briefly as follows:

- Stopped consonants (plosives) that require a complete stoppage of breath: *b, d, g, k, p,* and *t*
- Open consonants (fricatives) that require only partial stoppage of breath: *l, m, n, r, w,* and *y*
- Spirants, open consonants that produce friction in the oral passage: *f, j, s, v,* and *z*
- Aspirant, or breathed consonant, similar to a vowel: *h*

Figure 4.1

Second, it makes good sense to start decoding skills at the beginning of the word, because this teaches students to focus on the first part of the word, where the pronunciation and phonemic analysis (if necessary) begin. It also facilitates and reinforces the left-to-right progression needed for successful reading. When the student is just beginning to identify sounds in words, it is better to start at the beginning, where the consonant sound is generally more dominant, than in the middle or at the end of the word, where it is less dominant (Daniels and Diack 1956; Weaver 1970, cited in Adams 1998).

Third, it is generally better to start with consonants rather than vowels because consonants as a group are much more consistent in representing sounds (Adams 1998). Whereas most consonants represent only one sound, vowels generally represent more than one sound (*go, do, some, woman,* etc.). Not only do all vowel letters represent more than one sound, but a single sound (such as the long /i/, for example) can also be represented by different vowel letters and spellings (*I, eye, high, my, dye, tie, ice, choir,* etc.). It is difficult enough for the beginning reader to learn how to read without starting students out on the rocky road of learning vowel sounds before they are ready. After students have mastered the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, have learned a few basic sight words, and have gained experience with identifying consonant sounds, then they can be exposed to the more complicated and less consistent vowels sounds with a greater assurance of success.

WHEN TO START TEACHING CONSONANTS

The exact time to start teaching structured or formalized phonics concepts and practices is, according to one reading authority, "an emotionally loaded question" (Fry 1995, p.14). Fry goes on to explain that the research is inconclusive, but he feels that some kind of structured awareness should begin in kindergarten in the form of readiness activities, such as playing with letters, coloring them, and listening to rhymes and poetry. He further suggests that regular reading lessons should begin in first grade and that a complete line of phonics should extend into grade three, with some review, repetition, and, if necessary, remedial lessons later on.

Fry was talking about classroom teaching. Obviously, learning will be expedited if the child comes to school with some kind of readiness for learning sounds. Such activities as visiting the library, coloring letters in a coloring book, knowing the shapes of letters, singing the alphabet song, being able to identify some words, and so on, lay a good foundation. Storytelling by parents, and especially reading aloud to children on a regular basis, will help prepare them for more formal instruction and give them a good incentive for learning to read.

INTRODUCING CONSONANTS

To assist in the learning of these sounds, it is recommended that early elementary teachers display a large alphabet chart at the front of the classroom or in a place where everyone can easily view it when instruction is given. The teacher should refer to the chart often, especially when the students are just beginning to learn the sounds. It is also recommended that each student have his or her own set of alphabet cards with pictures representing words that have each letter as the beginning sound. Occasionally, the teacher should ask the students to arrange their alphabet cards in proper alphabetical order. These cards can also be used to identify certain letters or sounds and for spelling short words. These kinds of manipulative activities are something children enjoy doing. Most importantly, they give the student early success experiences with the alphabet and greatly assist in learning the initial sounds of the letters.

When students are in the early stages of learning sounds, it is important to remember that teachers don't want to get them into the habit of isolating or overemphasizing the individual sounds of the letters. The student should not

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make a practice of trying to sound out all the phonemes in the word in such a manner that the pronunciation becomes abnormal, so that *bat* ends up sounding like *buh-ah-tuh*. It is important that the student learn that *bat* is a one-syllable word, not a three-syllable word. Some emphasis on each phoneme can be helpful at the beginning stages of learning sounds, but overemphasis and unnatural distortion can soon become a stumbling block for learners.

Obviously, many different ways of getting started exist. It's impossible to go into detail about all the techniques teachers have used over the years to introduce consonant sounds. If a teacher is unsure of how to begin, she can choose among several methods to introduce initial consonant sounds to the class. One approach is to write one of the consonants on the board and ask the students to identify it. Next, ask for volunteers to name words that begin with that particular consonant and list them on the board (*B, b: boy, box, baseball, Ben, baby*). When students run out of ideas, ask them to put the words in a sentence, spell them, and write them down on paper to save for future reference.

Another popular activity is to have the children rummage through old magazines and newspapers to find pictures of objects with names that begin with the letter or letters they are learning. Have the children cut out the pictures and glue them on a sheet of paper that contains that letter. They can make their own personal letter scrapbook or contribute their page for a classroom alphabet book, or both. Another version of the same idea is to have students draw pictures of objects that start with a certain letter (*b: butterfly, c: cat, d: dog*, etc.), cut out the pictures, and paste them on a large sheet of poster board. This poster board can then be placed on the chalkboard ledge for easy viewing and reference. The number of poster board drawings will increase as more and more letters are learned. They can be easily stored for future reference and review.

Perhaps the best way to get ideas about how to introduce and reinforce consonants (or any other skill, for that matter) is to ask successful teachers what methods they find effective. Good, experienced classroom teachers know what works and what doesn't, and are often the best resources.

Should Students Memorize Rules?

Before explaining the rules for consonant sounds, it is important to say a few words about rules in general. The majority of the so-called rules that govern the structure of the English language, especially those related to the pronunciation and spelling of English, are generally so vague and confusing that memorizing them is not especially helpful to students (Clymer 1963). For example, the " *i* before *e*, except after *c*, or when sounding as *a*, as in *neighbor* and *weigh*" rule is correct about two-thirds of the time. So those who follow that rule are wrong one-third of the time. The rule stating that the *e* at the end of a word makes the vowel before it long is wrong about forty percent of the time. The teacher instructs her students that when two vowels come together in a word, "the first does the talking (is long) and the second does the walking (is silent)." Later on, one of her students comes across a common word such as *said, heart, head, great, friend,* etc. The student applies the rule when reading aloud, and the same teacher scolds him or her for being wrong. When a teacher asks students to try and remember rules and use them to decode new words in reading and spelling, she often puts them in the same predicament as the centipede in the verse below.

> The centipede was happy quite
> Until a toad in fun
> Said, "Pray which leg goes after which?"
> That worked her mind to such a pitch
> She lay distracted in a ditch
> Considering how to run.
> (Mrs. Edward Craster, cited in Furness 1990, 207)

When it comes to learning rules, teachers can present them in several ways that do not cause as much confusion or as many problems. First, stop calling them rules and start referring to them as generalizations or tendencies. Next, present enough examples of certain types of words so that students will note or discover how these generalizations work in the given situations. This means students must have opportunities to investigate words in order to discover relationships and tendencies—to find out which generalizations are reliable and which are not.

An excellent way to get students to internalize these tendencies is to give them plenty of practice with phonograms (Wylie and Durrell 1970). If students see and have enough experience with words that have the same ending (*take, bake, cake,* etc.), they will learn (without being taught) that the *e* at the end in these examples makes the *a* before it long. When students read a list of one-syllable words that end in *y* (*try, my, sky, buy,* etc.) they will learn, without memorizing a rule, that the *y* at the end of a one-syllable word generally has the long /i/ sound. Working with phonograms in this manner gives students a chance to internalize the generalization so that they apply that knowledge automatically when situations require it. In other words, students will be using a generalization without knowing it is a generalization. Through experience with words and the variations of spelling, students will discover over a period of time what tendencies they can depend on and which ones they should be cautious about. However the teacher manages it, she must make her students more aware of word tendencies, rather than presenting a list of "rules."

Having said that, one should not conclude that elementary teachers can just go ahead and ignore the rules. Knowledge of the generalizations and tendencies is important for the teacher because they give her an idea of what concepts have meaning and relevance—what should be taught and what should not be taught, and why. One reading authority points out that rules (generalizations) give particular attention to an aspect of spelling under study and, as such, have value (Adams 1998). Rules can also be used to strengthen the association that binds spelling combinations together and can be helpful for the learner to organize, notice, and reinforce relationships (Adams 1998).

TEACHING CONSONANTS IN THE INITIAL POSITION

Assuming the students have learned a few sight words and can identify most of the letters of the alphabet, they are now ready for the next logical step: learning the consonant sounds at the beginning of the word. The most widespread technique for teaching initial consonants is to begin with those that can be pronounced in isolation with the least distortion (Adams 1998). The consonants that represent one sound—*b, d, f, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, w, y* (in the initial position), and *z*—should be taught first. These consonants can flourish both in isolation (/f-f-f/, /m-m-m/, /s-s-s/) and in words in which they occur (e.g., *s-s-s-snake*) (Adams 1998). Later on, when children have had some successful experiences identifying more consistent consonants, they will be able to work with consonants (*c, s, g*) that have two sounds and are less consistent.

It should be noted that *y* is always a consonant when it is found at the beginning of the word (*yes, year,* etc.) and a vowel when found in the middle or at the end of a word (*by, nicely,* etc.). The letter *x* is excluded from the consonant list above because very few words, almost all of which are hyphenated, begin with that letter (*x-ray, X-rated,* etc.). The letter *x* is redundant to the extent that, when it starts a word it almost always represents the /z/ sound (*xylophone, xenophobic, xebec,* etc.).

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It is a good idea to avoid teaching letters in the same session that can be confused with each other in form or sound. Words that begin with letters similar in form—such as *d* and *b*, *m* and *n*, or *g* and *q*—are best presented in separate lessons so as not to confuse students. By the same token, it is not a good idea to teach letters that have similar sounds in the same lesson, for example, *c* and *s* or *g* and *j*. Later, when students have had more experience and practice with initial sounds, these letters may be presented together and the differences pointed out.

Generalizations for Sounds of Initial Consonants

One of the handy features of initial consonants is that they are quite consistent in the sounds they represent. Most of the initial consonants consistently represent only one sound. Even the few letters that have more than one sound (*c: cat, cell* and *g: gem, go*) follow patterns that are consistent and can be easily understood. Generalizations for initial consonants need not be memorized. The general knowledge of this consistency, however, can be helpful for learning new words.

1. The consonants *b, d, f, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, w, y,* and *z,* when appearing at the beginning of a word, generally represent one sound.
2. When the consonant *c* is followed by *a, o,* or *u,* it has the /k/ sound (*corn, cat, curl*). When *c* is followed by *e, i,* or *y,* it has the sound of /s/ (*city, cent, cycle*).
3. When the consonant *g* is followed by *e, i,* or *y,* it may have the sound of /j/ (*gem, giant, gym*). Most of the time *g* has the sound of /g/ (*good, gum, get*).
4. The consonant *q* has the sound of /kw/ (*queen, quit, quack*).
5. The letter *q* never appears by itself at the beginning of a word. It is always followed by the letter *u* (*queen, question, quiet*).
6. When the consonant *s* appears at the beginning of a word, it generally has the /s/ sound (*sun, soon, sat*). Occasionally, the *s* may have the sound of /sh/ or /zh/ (*sugar, treasure*). The /s/ sound may also be represented at the beginning of a word by the consonant *c* when the *c* is followed by an *e, i,* or *y* (*city, cent, cycle*). At the end of a word the *s* may represent the /z/ sound (*his, runs*).
7. The consonant *x* generally has the sound of /z/ at the beginning of a word (*xylem, Xerox*). A few hyphenated words (*X-ray, X-rated*) begin with *x*.

Figure 4.2 contains lists of words grouped according to their initial letter. The groups are presented in alphabetical order not because this is a recommended way to teach them, but rather to make them easier for the reader to follow and understand. For the most part these are words students in kindergarten and first grade have heard or seen in print materials used at home or in school. They are generally one-syllable words and can be learned without much difficulty by the majority of the students in the early grades. A teacher can either start with the words below or begin by having the students make up the list. It must be emphasized that the purpose of this list and all the others in this book is to give examples that may or may not be used according to teaching needs. They are not intended to be prescriptive.

Initial Consonants

b
book
boy
base
been
ball
big
box
bat
bet
bit
but
bench

c (k)
cat
car
came
cup
cook
call
come
coat
corn
cow
cap
cut

c (s)
cell
cite
city
center
cellar
circle
cider
circus
central
cycle
cent

d
day
did
dike
dish
do
dump
done
dare
disk
dew
ding
does

f
fish
fast
fog
fade
fang
fight
fit
fix
form
fun
food
fox

g
game
got
gave
gang
goat
gone
get
give
gum
gap
gate

g (j)
gee
gem
gym
giant
germ
gentle
ginger
gene
genus
George
gibe
gerbil

h
hat
her
hit
his
hurt
hot
hen
hint
hand
has
ham
home

j
jet
jump
just
jam
job
join
jar
joy
jade
jest
jeep
jail

k
keep
kick
kid
key
kin
kiss
king
kink
keen
kite
kit
kind

l
love
look
like
live
let
list
loot
lock
luck
line
lurk
lake

m
me
more
must
much
most
men
mind
mint
miss
milk
mouse
might

Figure 4.2

n
no
not
nut
nice
nor
neck
night
neat
noon
nun
nest
name

p
pan
pen
pin
pal
post
put
pain
pair
patch
park
pig
paint

q (qu)
quick
queen
quest
quack
quite
quit
quiz
quote
quart
quartz

r
run
red
row
rug
road
roar
read
ride
rip
room
ring
rim

s
sad
son
so
sing
sang
sat
sunk
sum
sock
sink
sand
sung

t
to
tight
test
tent
tube
toes
ten
tip
toss
two
time
top

v
van
voice
vane
vote
vest
vow
vent
verse
vine
vain
vase

w
we
went
want
were
was
war
will
wall
wow
walk
well
wolf

y
you
yet
young
yam
your
yeast
yell
year
yolk
yawn
yes

z
zip
zing
zoo
zoom
zinc
zeal
zest
zone
zap

Figure 4.2 (cont'd)

ACTIVITY Musical Consonants

One music activity that fits in nicely with learning initial consonants is to have students sing familiar songs, substituting sounds for words. The "Happy Birthday" song, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," and "I've Been Working on the Railroad," for example, can be sung by repeating a sound over and over again using the rhythm and tune of the song (*bah, bah, bah; zee, zee, zee; no, no, no,* etc.). Or a song such as "Old MacDonald" can be adapted and the letters changed as needed:

Old MacDonald had a farm

M, I, M, I, O.

And on that farm he had an M

M, I, M, I, O.

With an M right here,

And an M right there,

etc.

TEACHING PHONOGRAMS OR COMMON ENDINGS

Once the students have learned and have had plenty of practice with the initial consonant sounds they are ready to go on to the second stage of phonics instruction—learning about phonograms, or word families (Burns 1999). Fry describes a phonogram as follows: "A phonogram is usually a vowel sound plus a consonant sound, but it is often less than a word—it needs an initial consonant or blend to make it a word" (Fry 1995). Words that rhyme contain the same phonograms (e.g., *king, sing, thing; at, fat, cat*).

If students have learned the word *run* and learned the initial sounds of most consonants, they ought to be able to use that knowledge to figure out, or sound out, more words with similar sounds, such as *fun, nun, pun*, etc. If children know the word *at* they should find it easier to read and spell words in the same family (*fat, hat, rat, mat*, etc.). If children can recognize and pronounce the word *sing*, then *king, ring, wing*, and even *zing* should come quite naturally.

One of the nice features about teaching and learning phonograms is that although vowels and vowel digraphs in words are generally difficult to decode for young children, sounds in phonograms are relatively easy to read (Clymer 1963). Wylie and Durrell reinforce this conclusion. They reported that in a list of 286 rimes (word endings) that appear in primary texts, the vowels of 272 (95 percent) are pronounced the same in every word in which they are found (Wylie and Durrell 1970). They further point out that nearly 500 primary grade words can be derived from just 37 rimes (*-ack, -ail, -ain, -ake, -ale, -ame, -an, -ank, -ap, -ash, -at, -ate, -aw, -ay, -eat, -ell, -est, -ice, -ick, -ide, -ight, -ill, -in, -ine, -ing, -ink, -ip, -ir, -ock, -oke, -op, -or, -ore, -uck, -ug, -ump, -unk*).

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Phonograms are also a great aid in teaching vowel sounds. Because vowel sounds are inconsistent—a single vowel can represent different sounds and, inversely, a single sound may be represented by different vowels—they are generally difficult to teach and categorize. Using phonograms, however, vowels can be put into groups according to similar spelling patterns and, knowing that they all rhyme, the vowels will be pronounced the same. This goes for long vowels and short vowels, vowel digraphs and silent vowels.

One of the more important reasons for learning phonograms is to give the student a valuable tool for figuring out polysyllabic words. For example, the ending *at* as in *bat, fat,* and *mat* is also a syllable in longer words—attic, mathematics, habitat, etc. Tens of thousands of polysyllabic words in English contain letter combinations such as *ing, ent, ell, or,* etc., either at the beginning, the middle, or the end. Being able to recognize these sounds in words will be extremely valuable later on in life when the student becomes more exposed to words that are not seen very often or that are part of the vocabulary of an unfamiliar science or vocation. Without the ability to see and recognize familiar sounds in longer or unfamiliar words, even adults would be more likely to stumble over the pronunciation and spelling of words and names.

Although using word families is a very popular method of teaching sounds in today's classrooms, the method has been around for centuries (Smith 1986). In Colonial days Noah Webster's old Blue Backed Speller (one of the best-selling textbooks of all times) used phonograms to teach spelling, which in turn was used to teach reading. Phonograms can be as valuable a means to learn reading and spelling today as they were back then. See figures 4.3 and 4.4 for lists of common phonograms.

One of the more popular ways of introducing phonograms is to have students participate in compiling the list rather than just reproducing it and then passing it out to be learned. It's a simple procedure:

1. Write a known word on the board that contains one of the phonograms—*hat,* for example.
2. Have students pronounce the word, spell the word, and use it in a sentence. They should then write the word on a sheet of paper.
3. Erase the original initial consonant and substitute another consonant—*b,* for example. Write the new word on the board and ask the students to say the word.
4. Ask for another word that rhymes with *hat* and *bat,* and write it on the board. Have students use the word in a sentence and add it to their lists.

Sixty Most Common Phonograms

Word endings that are found in twelve or more words

-ab
-ack
-ad
-ag
-ail
-ain
-ake
-ale
-all
-am
-ame
-amp
-an
-ane
-ank
-are
-ap
-ash
-at
-ave
-ay
-eak
-ear
-eat
-ed
-eed
-eep
-ell
-en
-end
-ent
-est
-ick
-ide
-ig
-ight
-ill
-in
-ine
-ing
-ip
-it
-ock
-od
-og
-one
-ook
-op
-ore
-ot
-out
-ow (o)
-ow (ou)
-uck
-ug
-um
-ump
-unk
-ut
-y (i)

Figure 4.3

Sixty More Phonograms

Word endings that appear in fewer than twelve words

-ace
-ade
-air
-and
-ant
-ape
-ark
-art
-ass
-atch
-awl
-awn
-axe
-each
-ead
-eal
-eam
-ean
-eck
-ee
-eek
-eel
-een
-eer
-eet
-ench
-ice
-id
-ies
-ike
-ile
-ilt
-ime
-ipe
-ive
-oat
-ob
-oft
-oke
-old
-oll
-ool
-oon
-oop
-orn
-ose
-oss
-ouch
-ound
-own
-ud
-udge
-ue
-uff
-ull
-un
-unt
-ush
-ut
-ute

Figure 4.4

5. Repeat the steps until students cannot add any new words. If the list is small the teacher might suggest a word or two.
6. Have students save this list for spelling, writing, and review purposes.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with the teacher making a list of rhyming words for students and distributing it for review, rote reading, creative writing, or other kinds of activities.

ACTIVITY Hink Pinks

A fun writing activity that coordinates well with writing and spelling is to have students make up "hink pinks," or pairs of rhyming words. Hink pinks help students discover the spelling pattern of words in the same family. If students enjoy making a collection of their favorite hink pinks, this could be an ongoing project. Here are a few the teacher might use to get the children started: glum chum, low blow, fish dish, fat cat, ten men, blew stew, loose goose. Who can make the most? Who has the funniest one? Can anyone think of "hinky pinkies," or two-syllable rhyming words, such as double trouble? This project can also be extended to art classes, where a student might want to draw a picture of a fat cat, loose goose, wet pet, etc.

ACTIVITY Verse Completion

Another suggestion that works very well with younger children in kindergarten and first grade is to read to them from a book of verse. Pause before the rhyme and then let students supply the missing word. After a verse has been read encourage the class to recite the verse together with the teacher in a sing-song manner. Allow the students to clap their hands to denote the rhythm. See if they can even make up their own little song around the verse.

TEACHING ENDING CONSONANT SOUNDS

Consonant sounds that appear at the end of a word may be taught in somewhat the same manner as initial consonant sounds. Start with a word the class knows. The students listen to the final consonant sound and then give examples of other words that have that same final sound.

The examples in figure 4.5, like most of the words in the other lists in this book, are one-syllable words and are well within the speaking and listening vocabularies of children in grades one and two. Unlike the listings for phonograms, these words will not be as easy to spell or write because they might contain vowel spellings that are not familiar. This is one of the reasons ending consonants should be taught after students have had some experience with initial consonants and phonograms. Many of the phonograms listed in figures 4.3 and 4.4 are contained in the list in figure 4.5.

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Ending Consonant Sounds

/b/	/d/	/f/	/g/	/k/	/l/	/m/
cob	red	if	big	work	fail	ham
lab	kid	wolf	rug	kick	call	time
job	wed	wife	fig	make	ill	room
tub	mud	safe	lug	duck	sell	gum
bib	good	off	wig	tock	tall	gem
cab	read	leaf	dog	desk	cool	bum
tab	bid	turf	bag	luck	fool	come
mob	bold	puff	keg	lake	mill	him
rib	head	half	sag	cook	mile	home
web	loud	life	lag	mark	girl	dumb
tube	did	roof	mug	take	heel	same
bob	bad	golf	bug	dock	tool	harm

/n/	/p/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/z/
an	pip	dear	gas	feet	save	is
gone	lap	hair	boats	hot	give	ease
fin	lip	tar	house	kit	leave	ties
corn	soap	hear	miss	get	dove	was
pun	jeep	her	bliss	hat	love	size
seen	pup	fair	dress	meat	gave	fuzz
pine	hope	jar	worse	coat	drive	quiz
tan	map	fur	yes	lot	live	he's
done	whip	bear	mess	mat	dive	tease
soon	zap	jeer	nurse	foot	wave	rise
win	ship	sure	lass	boat	move	does
fun	rope	for	purse	cut	hive	his

Figure 4.5

ACTIVITY

Word Detective

Students generally have more problems with the sounds of ending consonants than they do with those at the beginning of the word. An activity that really aids in identifying endings is to play word detective. Ask the class to open up their reading book to a page that has a lot of print. Ask them to make a list of the words they find on that page (or in that story) that end in the letters you want them to identify. Which ending is found most often? A variation of this is to give students an assignment (homework) asking them to find five words that end with *k* in the daily newspaper, ten words that end with *s*, etc. This is a good way to get parents involved.

TEACHING INITIAL CONSONANT BLENDS AND DIGRAPHS

Consonant blends are formed when two consonants come together to form a blending or gliding sound that slightly affects the separate sound of each letter—the /gr/ sound as in *grass*, the/bl/ sound as in *black*, and the /sp/ sound as in *spell*, for example.

Consonant digraphs are formed when two consonants come together to form a separate sound unlike those of either letter—the /ch/ sound as in *child*, the /wh/ sound as in *when*, and the /th/ sound as in *thin*, for example. Figure 4.6 contains examples of words with initial blend sounds.

Once students learn the 26 letters of the alphabet and begin to associate sounds with those letters, they soon discover that consonants and especially vowels can represent more than one sound. They also learn that when certain letters are side by side they can form a distinct sound different from that associated with either letter. In the process of learning sounds and words students discover that there are at least 25 different pronunciations for consonants, and that there are at least 33 more ways these consonants can blend together to form new sounds. This adds up to a total of at least 58 different ways consonants (by themselves or in conjunction with another consonant or consonants) can represent sounds. Is it any wonder, then, that it takes some students so long to learn how to read and that practice and repetition are so necessary?

One of the most convenient features about blends and consonant digraphs is that they consistently represent only one sound. Once students learn certain blend sounds they can depend on that consistency. For this reason blends and consonant digraphs are easily learned by most students and rarely the source of spelling mistakes.

Having previous experience of working with consonant sounds and phonograms makes it easier for students to move on to the next step of learning blends and digraphs. If they are able to read the words *lack* and *back*, for example, and if they can pronounce the phonogram *ack*, it should be fairly easy to put this information together and learn the new word *black*. The *bl* never changes its sound, so students can go on to other *bl* words with common phonograms, such as *blow, bliss, blend, blare, blame*, etc.

It must be pointed out that the example of how a student can use knowledge of consonant sounds to learn blend sounds is more theoretical than practical. It is presented as an example of logical sequencing in order to demonstrate how learning one skill can assist in learning another. It only works this way, however, when students are at a particular stage of learning. It is a fact that some students already know many blend sounds before they know what the initial consonants are or even all the letters of the alphabet. It is important to remember that many will never need explicit instruction in the particular skills mentioned in this chapter and other sections of the book, because they have already internalized them in their own way and do not need additional practice. For a few students, all that's needed is a good book that interests them, and all the problems that haunt other students are irrelevant. In other words, the examples presented here should be learned by the teacher so that she can use this information when it is needed and in whatever order it is needed. It is not intended for every student every time.

ACTIVITY

Blend Twisters

A good way to help students become more aware of the sounds of initial blends and digraphs and to give them more practice with these sounds is to have them write "blend twisters," or sentences that have words that begin with the same blend sound. Although it is generally better to have students come up with their own twisters, the following ones may serve to get them started or as a reminder of how these sounds behave.

- Snappy snails sniff snoring snakes.
- Skinny skeletons ski skillfully skyward.
- Green growing grass gradually grows gray.
- Shifty sharks shatter shiny ships.
- Friendly Freddie frees Frank from frisky frogs.

TEACHING SILENT CONSONANTS

One of the most debilitating factors for teaching letter-sound relationships is the fact that as many as one-sixth of all our words have silent letters in them. The most frequent occurrences of silent letters are in vowel sounds. The silent *e* at the end of a word that sometimes causes the vowel before it to become long (*rope, game,* etc.) and vowel digraphs where one of the vowels is silent (*dead, build,* etc.) are the two primary culprits.

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Initial Blend Sounds

br
brace
brush
brim
brake
bring
brought
bright
brother
brain
bridge
brook
brag

cr
crow
crest
crate
crisp
crimp
cry
cram
crack
crisp
cream
crude
crook

dr
draw
dress
drew
dream
drop
drip
drum
drill
drove
drink
drank
drive

fr
from
frank
friend
frog
free
fresh
fruit
fright
frost
fry
front
frame

gr
grow
greet
grin
gripe
green
gray
grew
grape
grit
gruff
group
grace

pr
print
prank
prince
pray
prize
proof
prop
prong
price
pry
press
pride

tr
trade
tray
treat
trace
trip
truck
train
track
trash
try
true
trap

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black
bliss
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blow
bless
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bleach
blame
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blast
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class
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cloud
climb
clear
clock
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clog
clove

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flop
fly
flake
flip
flap
fled
flight
flesh
flow
flew

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glide
glen
glance
glue
gloom
glee
glitch
gloat
glut
glib

pl
play
plow
plate
place
plunge
plane
plug
plight
plot
plump
plain
plank

sl
slow
slap
slant
slug
slim
slate
slide
slice
slash
slip
sleep
slick

tw
twenty
twist
twin
twelve
twine
twang
tweak
twig
tweeze
tweet
twice
tweed

sc
scold
score
scant
scan
scar
scoff
scare
scab
scarf
scamp

sk
skip
sky
skill
skate
skull
skit
skin
ski
skid
skirt
skunk
skim

sm
small
smell
smile
smart
smug
smog
smooth
smack
smoke
smear

sn
snip
snort
snap
snow
snug
snare
snail
snub
sniff
snake
snoop
snore

sp
spill
spell
spoil
spoon
sponge
speak
spin
spit
sped
spine
speed
spot

st
star
start
steer
stair
stay
state
stale
stick
stall
stash
stage

sw
swing
sway
swell
swipe
sweet
swear
swam
swim
swat
swift
swoop
swish

Figure 4.6

scr	**squ**	**str**	**thr**	**spr**	**spl**	**shr**
scrub	square	straw	three	spring	splash	shrill
scream	squad	stray	through	split	splice	shrink
screw	squint	stream	thrown	sprite	spleen	shrug
scrimp	squeak	strong	throng	spry	splint	shrank
script	squash	straight	throne	spray	splat	shrunk
scrap	squirt	string	throat	spread	splurge	shrine
scruff	squeal	strip	threw	sprung	splotch	shriek
scribe	squeeze	strange	thrill	spruce		shred
screen	squawk	strike	throb	sprout		shrub
scratch	squid	stripe	thrive	sprig		shrewd
scroll		street	throw	sprawl		
		strap				

Figure 4.6 (con't)

The most frequent occurrence of silent consonants is the doubling of consonants that often appears in the middle of words (*letter, message, dinner,* etc.). Whereas these double consonants pose no problems in reading (*letter* and *leter* are generally both pronounced alike), double letters do present a major problem in spelling. The omission of one of the doubled letters (*beter, begining, sorow,* etc.) is incorrect, as is the doubling of other letters that should not be doubled (*trainning, bussiness, writting, doubble,* etc.). It's not possible to tell just from the pronunciation when those double consonants should be used.

One of the positive features of silent consonants is that most of them are very predictable and can be taught as generalizations. Again, it is not recommended that students memorize these generalizations. It is recommended, however, that students be given opportunities to work with words that contain the silent letters to become familiar with the word patterns. With enough exposure and practice students should have little trouble with silent letters.

Figure 4.7 is a list of silent consonants and common words that contain them.

Generalizations Concerning Silent Consonants

1. When a word contains a double consonant in the middle (*butter, summer, sudden,* etc.) it is sounded as a single consonant.
2. When a word ends in *mb,* the *b* is generally silent (*lamb, climb, dumb,* etc.).

Silent Consonants

double	m(b)	(c)k	i(gh)	(k)n	(t)en	(w)r
happy	bomb	rock	fight	knock	often	wrap
letter	climb	tick	eight	knew	listen	write
dinner	comb	tock	weight	know	hasten	wrote
supper	lamb	tack	might	knee	soften	wrong
jell	dumb	duck	right	kneel	fasten	wreak
zipper	tomb	block	straight	knife	brighten	wren
summer	thumb	deck	flight	knit	glisten	wrist
mitten	numb	black	light	knob	moisten	wreck
ladder	limb	lock	night	known		wreath
collect	crumb	pick	high	knack		

Figure 4.7

3. When a word ends in *ck*, the *c* is generally silent (*kick, duck, back,* etc.).
4. When a word begins with *wr,* the *w* is generally silent (*wren, wrist, wrong,* etc.).
5. When a word begins with *kn,* the *k* is generally silent (*know, knife, knit,* etc.).
6. When the letters *gh* are preceded by an *i,* the *gh* is generally silent (*right, night, brighten,* etc.).
7. There are no good generalizations for other silent consonants such as the silent *l* (*half, folks,* etc.), the silent *g* (*sign, gnash, reign,* etc.), and the silent *h* (*hour, ghost, honor,* etc.) (Heilman 1966).

ACTIVITY Silent Letter Detective

An entertaining activity to make students more aware of the silent letters in words and their frequency in print is to have them play word detective from time to time to find out how many silent letters occur in a particular story or article. Have students write out the words they find and then categorize them according to similarities of spelling. Another way to cause some excitement about silent letters is to designate a space on the blackboard for words that contain silent letters. Whenever students encounter a word with a silent letter that day, they are allowed to go to the board and write it in the space provided. This list could include not only silent consonants but silent vowels and vowel digraphs as well. This activity is not recommended as daily practice. Every once in a while should be sufficient to serve the purpose.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter a great deal of material about teaching consonants is presented along with information about rules and plenty of examples. The material is introduced in ascending order—from easier concepts to more complicated ones—to show a logical or natural flow for these skills. The order in which the concepts are presented reflects how most children would go about learning them.

Formalized phonics instruction first begins with teaching students individual letters and showing them how to blend them together to make words (Stahl et al. 1998). This formal process usually takes place in first grade, although the foundation is laid in kindergarten and preschool activities, especially those involving books. The second step is to assist the students not only in learning how to analyze the sounds of letters, but also in putting them together to make words. This process can be made most effective by exposing students to word families (phonograms), which have similar sounds and sound spellings that aid students in learning new words. As one authority put it, "Phonograms provide a useful bridge to the level of phonemic and phonological awareness upon which skilled reading depends" (Adams 1998, 327).

As students begin to develop a greater awareness of sounds and spelling patterns and become able to recognize some high-frequency words that do not conform to normal or regular patterns (*do, love, come, said,* etc.), they become better prepared to tackle more advanced skills involving digraphs and blends. They become more capable of decoding more complicated spelling patterns. This usually occurs in second or third grade. Other skills involving word structure, syllabication, affixes, and word analysis are put off to the later grades.

When planning lessons to teach consonants and other phonics topics, it is important to remember that phonics instruction should generally be of short duration. There ought to be a specific reason for using it. It should be integrated into as many language arts projects as possible. And phonics activities need not be boring. With a little thought and planning, they can even become interesting, and maybe even fun!

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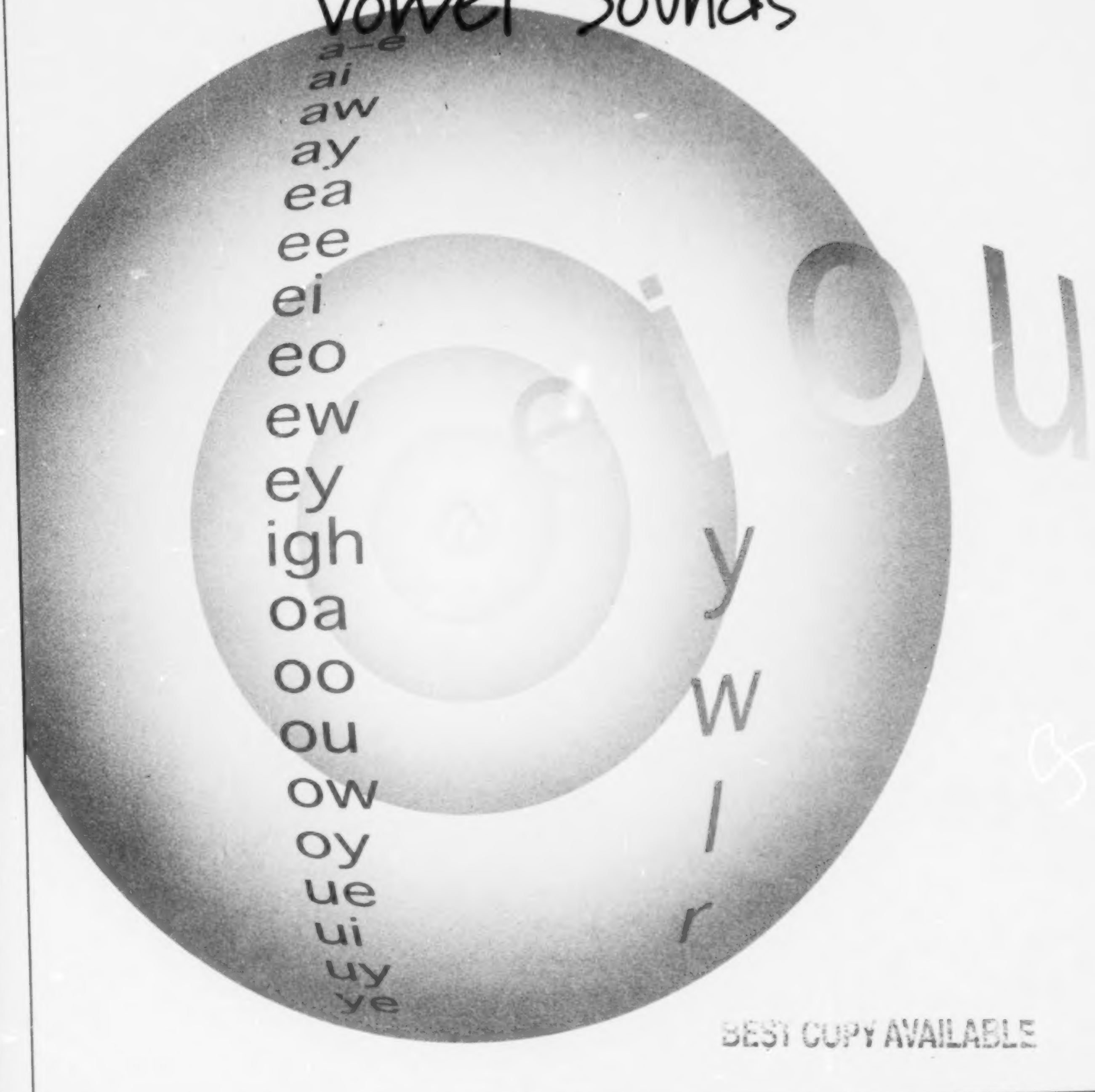
Chapter 5

Teaching Vowel Sounds


a–e
ai
aw
ay
ea
ee
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r

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For many teachers, having to teach vowel sounds is not only one of the least enjoyable aspects of teaching reading, it is also one of the most difficult. Students find it equally frustrating, and they generally make far more errors in reading the vowels in words than the consonants (Monroe 1932). The first problem the teacher faces is trying to determine just how many vowel sounds there are in the first place. Whereas it is generally believed that English has only five real vowels *a, e, i, o, u,* and sometimes a sixth, *y,* some linguists postulate that other letters such as *w, l,* and *r* can, at times, also be considered vowels or semivowels.

SOUNDS AND SPELLINGS OF VOWELS

While the discussion about the exact number of vowels is worthy of note, this number doesn't really have much importance when it comes to teaching reading. It's not the number of vowel letters, or graphemes, that's important, it's the number of vowel sounds, or phonemes. English may have five, six, or seven vowel graphemes, depending upon what definition is used to define a vowel, but it has approximately 20 to 22 different vowel phonemes, which can be spelled or represented in hundreds of different ways (Pitman and St. John 1969).

Whereas consonants, for the most part, are fairly consistent in sound and spelling and can be taught in a straightforward manner, vowels come in a wide variety of both sounds and spellings. It would not only be virtually impossible to teach and learn all the various combinations of spellings, it would be devastating for students.

Figure 5.1 is a listing of vowel sounds and the more common spellings of these sounds. It must be noted that because of dialectical differences, many words such as *because, been, alms,* and *half,* which have more than one acceptable pronunciation, may very well fit into several categories. It is also difficult to compare vowel sounds when the only evidence is the written material. The listing below serves the purpose of pointing out to teachers the many spellings of each phoneme so that they may be taught when appropriate. The listing also demonstrates in a graphic manner the difficult problem vowels pose for children in the process of learning to read.

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Vowel Phonemes and Graphemes

Phoneme	Graphemes	Examples
/ă/ (cat)	a, ai, al, au	cat, plait, calf, laugh
/ā/ (make)	a, a–e, ay, ai, aigh, e, ea, ee, ei, eigh, ey	able, take, play, train, straight, forte, great, melee, eight, they
/âr/ (care)	are, ai, ay, e, ea	care, fair, prayer, there, wear
/ä/ (father)	a, ah, al, e, ea	father, shah, palm, sergeant, hearth
/ĕ/ (bet)	e, a, ai, ay, e, ea, eo, ie, u	end, many, said, says, set, head, leopard, friend, bury
/ē/ tree	e, ea, ee, ei	me, leap, meet, receive
/ĭ/ (in)	i, y, a, ee, ia, ie, o, u, ui	pill, hymn, village, been carriage, sieve, women, busy, guilty
/ī/ (eye)	i–e, y, ai, ay, ei, uy, y, ye	mine, my, aisle, aye, height, buy, sky, rye
/ir/ (fear)	e, ea, ee, ei, ie	here, tear, beer, weird, pier
/ŏ/ (not)	o, a, ho, ou	hot, what, honest, trough
/ō/ (no)	o, o–e, eau, eo, ew, oa, oe, oh, oo, ou, ough, ow, owe	no, vote, bureau, yeoman, sew, board, foe, oh, brooch, shoulder, though, low, owe
/ô/ (fall)	a, al, ah, au, aw, ou	all, talk, Utah, daughter, paw, trough
/oi/ (oil)	oi, oy	noise, toy
/ou/ (mouse)	ou, ow, ough	house, now, bough
/oo/ (cook)	oo, u, o, oul	look, full, woman, could
/oo/ (toot)	oo, u–e, eu, ew, o, eo, ou, ough, eu, ui	boot, rule, rheumatic, drew, move, canoe, croup, through, blue, fruit
/ŭ/ (cut)	u, o, oe, ou	but, some, does, trouble
/yoo/ (use)	u, u–e, eau, eu, ew, ieu, iew, ue, you	use, yule, beauty, feud, few, adieu, view, cue, you
/ûr/ (fern)	er, ir, or, ur, our	stern, first, work, burn, journey

Figure 5.1

Vowels are like chameleons—just as chameleons change their colors according to their environment, vowels change sounds according to the surrounding letters. For example, the most frequently used letter in English is *e*. And look at all the phonemic problems that accompany it. In most cases, a single *e* indicates the short /e/ sound as in *spent, end, vowel,* etc. When it combines with another vowel, however, it can help change an accompanying vowel into a long vowel and help represent the sound of five long vowels: /a/—*weigh,* /e/—*feet,* /i/—*pie,* /o/—*doe,* /u/—*true.* When an *e* appears at the end of the word, it is generally silent and often makes the vowel before it long (*home, dive, save,* etc.) Then again, it sometimes doesn't make the vowel before it long (*love, come, gone,* etc.). The short /e/ can be represented in at least ten different ways, the long /e/ in fourteen ways. The other vowel sounds have almost the same kind of diversity problems, with the long /o/, which can be spelled or written in at least 25 different ways, leading the way (Pitman and St. John 1969).

The good news is that, when examined, the vowel confusion problems become ever less confusing. For example, let us take a closer look at the spelling patterns of the 500 words of the American Heritage Word List that most often occur in printed material in elementary grades. Thirty-five words in the list contain the long /a/ sound and six different spelling patterns. At first glance this would seem to pose a big problem for someone who wanted to use the sounding-out method. With further investigation, however, it soon becomes apparent that 26 of the 34 words have one of two consistent patterns that can be easily learned. Two other words have a consistent vowel digraph (*-ai-*) to indicate pronunciation. Three words slightly misdirect pronunciation and only two words, *they* and *great,* misdirect the vowel sound. These two words could easily be learned as sight words. Figure 5.2 breaks down the spellings of words from the American Heritage list with the long /a/ sound.

These alternative patterns may, and often do, cause spelling problems when one tries to determine which one to use, but they do not generally cause confusion in reading; students automatically pronounce the words correctly because of how they are used in a sentence. No student would say, for example, "Mother held the *bah-by* in her arms," thinking the /a/ is short; nor would he or she read "Dad read the *pah-per.*" Even though normally a single /a/ might tend toward the /ah/ sound, the whole environment of the word leads to the correct pronunciation. The letters in a word may not always lead to the exact pronunciation, but they generally take us close enough, so that the word's pronunciation is easily surmised from the context in which it is used.

Spellings for the Long /a/ Sound

a–e	-ay	-ai-	-ea-	-a-	-ey
make	way	rain	great	table	they
made	day	tail		baby	
same	may			paper	
take	say				
page	away				
gave	always				
change	play				
place	days				
face	ways				
names	today				
space	stay				
game	maybe				
came					
makes					
name					
places					

Figure 5.2

Like much else in life, our sound spellings may not be perfect, but they are good enough to be useful.

TEACHING VOWEL SOUNDS

Fortunately, students don't have to deal with every permutation of every vowel all at once, or even at all, in the early stages of reading. As with consonants, if vowels are presented correctly, students soon discover that learning just one word or sound can serve as a building block in learning other words and sounds. By noting similarities and differences in sounds and words and applying what they learn to new situations, students quickly discover that one bit of knowledge leads to another, one success leads to another, so that what they once thought was a difficult task becomes easier and easier with greater exposure and experience. As students practice these sounds, they will develop automatic word recognition so that they can concentrate more fully on the meaning of the text (Chall 1967; Ehri 1995).

Let us pause in the discussion of learning letter sounds to remind the teacher that phonics only goes so far, and that other approaches and ideas also have meaning for students. Phonics is not the only means of teaching reading, nor is it the whole package. Far from it. It is precisely because students cannot depend entirely on symbol-sound relationships that they need to learn to use context, structure, and the meaning of other words in a sentence to help decode words and get meaning from what they read. Just as it is wrong for teachers of whole language to ignore or trivialize phonics, so, too, it is wrong for teachers of phonics to ignore other aspects of the language program. Teachers must always remember that phonemic awareness is very important in learning how to read, especially at the early stages, but it is only a part of the process.

Fortunately for students, most of the words they are introduced to in early reading programs are consistent in their spelling pattern. Generally, these first words are one-syllable words with short vowel sounds in the medial position, such as *run, bed, hand, her,* etc. Words that contain long vowels are generally fairly consistent (*home, year, no, play, keep,* etc.) (Heilman 1964). Common short words with misleading spelling patterns such as *live, read, come, gone, two,* etc., can easily be taught as sight words without discussing types of vowels.

After students are able to identify all the letters of the alphabet, can identify some words by sight, and have experience with using consonant sounds, they are ready for the next step—learning vowel sounds.

Although there is no universal agreement on the exact order in which vowel sounds should be taught, it is generally agreed that it is better educationally to start by introducing short vowel sounds. Some reading programs advocate the teaching of long vowels first because they have the special advantage of sounding like the letter name (Adams 1998). The major problem with this procedure, however, is that long sounds are often signaled by use of inconsistent vowel digraphs (*say, read, fight, roam, fuel,* etc.) or with an *e* at the end of the word (*home, cape, use,* etc.). Beginning with long vowels thus presents word pattern issues that are better saved for later (Adams 1998). The reason for starting with short vowels is quite logical. Most of the words students first learn to read contain them. If students have been exposed to consonant sounds and word families, most of the words they have encountered in this context also contain short vowel sounds. Last, short vowels are more regular and less complicated than long vowels and, for that reason alone, are easier to learn.

Again, it makes sense to start first with the familiar and less complicated and proceed from there to the less familiar and more irregular examples.

Every early elementary classroom should have one or more vowel charts that not only contain both the upper- and lowercase vowel letters, but also a picture of an object that represents each vowel sound, so that children can easily identify the vowel with a word containing its sound. The long /a/, for example, would appear on the chart along with a picture representing that sound, such as an *ape;* the short /a/ would appear along with a picture of an *apple*. A second chart depicting the vowel sounds within words—*a* as in *cake* or *cat; e* as in *hen,* or *ten,* for example—might also be quite useful in providing visual clues for learning these sounds. Although these vowel charts are available at many teachers' stores and other commercial outlets, it would certainly be a great class project to have the students become involved in making their own. They might make a large one for the classroom and another more personal one for themselves. This would be a delightful way to integrate an art class or two with reading activities. Provided it is not overdone, and is done for the right reasons, the more variety and activities we put into reading class, the more meaningful reading becomes for the student. Figure 5.3 is an example of one kind of vowel chart.

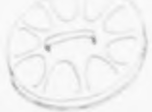
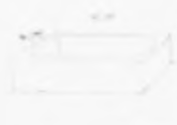
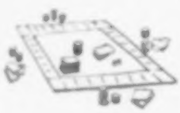
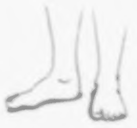
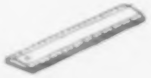
<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">Short Vowels</th></tr>
<tr><td>Aa</td><td>Ee</td><td>Ii</td><td>Oo</td><td>Uu</td></tr>
<tr><td>bat
 </td><td>leg
 </td><td>lid
</td><td>rock
 </td><td>tub
</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="5">Long Vowels</th></tr>
<tr><td>Aa</td><td>Ee</td><td>Ii</td><td>Oo</td><td>Uu</td></tr>
<tr><td>game
</td><td>feet
</td><td>fire
 </td><td>rose
 </td><td>ruler
</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 5.3

SHORT VOWEL SOUNDS

Once students have some visual references, the teacher might begin teaching vowel sounds in somewhat the same way she introduced the initial consonants. Starting with the first short vowel phoneme, the teacher writes on the chalkboard a group of words students may already know that contain that sound in the middle position (*cat, man, ham, back, pat,* etc.). She might then ask students to pronounce the words with emphasis on the vowel sound. Have the students spell one of the words and use it in a sentence. Stress that the short sound of /a/ does not sound like the name of the letter *a*. Ask the students to name other words that have the short /a/ sound. Write these words on the board. At this point, the teacher might point out the spelling pattern, noting that when the letter *a* has a consonant before and after it, it has the sound of a short /a/, the same sound as the words listed on the board or chart. However, it is not important to teach rules or generalizations now; students ought to be able observe similarities and internalize certain generalizations on their own.

Figure 5.4 contains listings of one-syllable words with the vowel in the medial position that students may already know or will soon encounter in beginning reading programs. Aside from presenting these words in reading classes, they are also appropriate for spelling and writing assignments.

Short /a/ Sounds

cab
jam
tag
van
fat
gas
nab
bat
dash
ran
bad
sag
lab
Pam
cap
dad
lag
hat
pal
fan
ham
rap
Sam
pad
lap
has
ram
sap
had
sand
cat
tab
nap
can
lad
wag
zap
mat
bag
plan
man
mad
sad
map
had
rat
lab
vat
tan
lamp

Short /e/ Sounds

less
net
bell
dell
bet
men
set
wed
peg
red
hem
Ned
tell
jet
pen

Figure 5.4

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Short /e/ Sounds (con't)

fed
red
web
felt
Ben
met
pest
leg
bed
Ted
pet
test
best
went
yet
sell
jell
shell
pep
wet
sell
ten
rest
led
let
hen
hem
vet
send
met
yes
Ken
zest

Short /i/ Sounds

bit
hid
miss
tip
fix
rip
lid
fill
sick
bin
pit
bill
nip
shin
bid
kit
tin
kiss
skip
mint
will
fit
bid
Jim
miss
lip
kill
six
pig
fib
mill
bib
rich
hit
him
bin
rib
fin
Dick
pig
rim
Tim
kid
till
win
wit
hill
lit
fin
did

Short /o/ Sounds

cot
hop
cob
hog
cob
rob
dock
pot
top
lob
box
Bob
got
nod
not
rock
dot
cop
shop
lock
Don
pod
lob
hot
pox
jot
mop
got
fox
rod
job
sob
pond
lot
fond
lock
sod
sock
Tom
cod
rot
hop
bond
pop
hop
sob
pond

Short /u/ Sounds

pup
fun
hug
dull
run
cut
rub
must
lush
sum
rung
bus
gut
hub
bug
tub
bust
nut
lull
Gus
lug
puff
cup
bud
hut
bus
hum
dud
but
tug
gum
mug
pun
sub
fuss
rug
jut
dug
mud
rush
pun
much
mutt
duck
sun
such
dust
bun

Figure 5.4 (cont'd)

ACTIVITY Missing Vowels

To make students more aware of vowel sounds, write a short story, or a few sentences from the story, on the board, omitting the vowels. Ask volunteers to read the story according to what they think the words mean. You may also ask the students to write the words on a sheet of paper, supplying the correct vowels. From the popular story "The Little Engine that Could," for example, you could write the following sentence on the board, leaving a space for the proper vowels or vowel digraphs: "Sh_ w_s _ h_pp_ l_ttl_ tr__n f_r sh_ h_d s_ch _ j_lly l__d t_ c_rry."

Another variation would be to write a series of longer words on the board without their vowels and then find out how students figure out what each word might mean. Words such as sbtrctn (subtraction), ndrstndng (understanding), and Mchgn (Michigan) make a good challenge for students. This is especially meaningful for later elementary grades.

Playing word detective and finding all the words in a story that have short vowels is another useful activity for identifying vowel sounds. After these words have been identified they may be placed on a word wall in the classroom for future reference.

LONG VOWEL SOUNDS

As has been stated several times before, there are no perfectly consistent rules for teaching vowel sounds in English. For this reason and others, it is not recommended that generalizations be memorized by the students. It is, on the other hand, desirable and appropriate that the teacher present these generalizations in such a way that students see their application in reading and spelling (Adams 1998). The teacher, therefore, should know the generalizations well enough to be able to point out these relationships and assist students in applying them when necessary. The most consistent long vowel generalizations are listed below.

The Most Consistent Generalizations for Long Vowels

1. Long /a/ sound: When *e* appears at the end of a word, the *a* before it is almost always long: *make, take, fame,* etc. When *ay* appears at the end of a word, the *ay* is pronounced as a long /a/: *play, today, may, say,* etc.

When an *a* is followed by an *i*, the *a* is almost always long and the *i* is almost always silent: *fail, mail, aid, wait,* etc.

2. Long /e/ sound: The long /e/ sound is most often represented by three digraphs: *ee* (*tree, see, deed, peek,* etc.), *ea* (*teach, each, team, weak,* etc.), and *ie* (*grief, thief, piece, niece,* etc.). When the digraph *ey* appears at the end of the word, it generally has the long /e/ sound: *jockey, valley, chimney,* etc. When the adverbial ending *-ly* is added to a word, the final *y* has the long sound of /e/: *nicely, sadly, willingly, silently,* etc. One-syllable words ending in *e* have the long /e/ sound: *me, be, we,* etc.
3. Long /i/ sound: When *e* appears at the end of a word, the *i* before it is generally long and the final *e* is silent: *nice, wide, tile, ice,* etc. When a word contains the combination *igh,* the *g* and the *h* are silent and the *i* is long: *night, fight, light, bright,* etc. When a one-syllable word ends in *y*, it generally has a long /i/ sound: *try, my, sky, buy,* etc. Even when the spelling of *y* changes to *i* when plural and past tense endings are added, it still retains the long /i/ sound: *flies, skies, cried, tried,* etc. When the vowel *i* is followed by *-nd, -gh,* or *-ld,* it frequently has the long vowel sound.
4. Long /o/ sound: When *e* appears at the end of a word, the /o/ is generally long: *home, note, doze, rose,* etc. When the vowel digraph *oa* appears in a word, the *o* is generally long and the *a* is silent: *boat, oats, foam, coal,* etc. When a word ends with *o* or *oe,* it generally has the long /o/ sound: *no, so, toe, tomato,* etc. When the vowel *o* is followed by *-ld,* it usually has the long sound: *old, hold, fold,* etc. The vowel digraph *ow* often has the long /o/ sound: *blow, show, fellow, row,* etc.
5. Long /u/ sound: When *e* appears at the end of a word, the /u/ before it is generally long: *use, mule, dune, cube,* etc. When the letter combinations *ew* and *ue* appear at the end of a word they usually make the long /u/ sound: *new, few, blue, clue, chew,* etc. The combination *oo* often has the long /u/ sound: *too, moo, noon, zoom, bloom,* etc.

Although long vowels can be spelled or represented in many uncommon or irregular ways, the vast majority of words fall into several common and regular spelling patterns. Research has shown, for example, that in a sampling of 3,000 basic words, 85 percent are spelled with complete regularity (Hanna and Moore 1953). Many consistent alternative spellings of long vowels can be quickly learned and mastered with a little effort. Figure 5.5 shows the primary spelling patterns for each long vowel.

Long Vowel Sounds

a–e (a)
tame
save
rake
cake
wage
rave
cape
face
safe
age
race
bake

-ay (a)
bay
may
ray
way
jay
say
pay
day
gay
lay
nay
hay

-ai- (a)
fail
jail
mail
nail
pail
sail
tail
aid
laid
paid
wait
raid

-ee- (e)
peep
beef
feed
peek
peel
feet
heel
deep
seed
jeep
steel
feel

-ea- (e)
beat
leaf
meal
beak
team
tea
deal
beam
eat
heat
bean
weak

-e, -ee (e)
be
fee
free
he
Lee
me
tree
gee
tee
bee
we
see

-ie- (e)
brief
field
niece
priest
grief
fierce
piece
shield
chief
wield
pier
thief

-ey (e)
galley
key
valley
kidney
barley
donkey
money
hockey
jockey
monkey
chimney
turkey

i–e (i)
dice
hide
five
hike
pile
dine
tide
file
hire
lime
wide
mice

-y (i)
by
my
cry
dry
fly
ply
thy
sky
spy
fry
pry
shy

-ye, -ie (i)
bye
rye
lye
fries
dye
eye
die
vie
lie
pie
tie
eyes

-igh (i)
bright
light
thigh
right
might
high
fight
sigh
night
sight
plight
tight

Figure 5.5

o–e (o)	**-oa- (o)**	**-ow (o)**	**-o, -oe (o)**
home	boat	blow	doe
nose	coal	low	foe
bone	coat	show	go
poke	foam	bow	hoe
doze	goal	own	Joe
cope	goat	row	toe
tone	load	mow	no
hose	loaf	snow	poem
robe	moan	flow	woe
mode	moat	stow	silo
rope	float	tow	so
hope	oath	glow	bingo

u–e (oo)	**-ue (oo)**	**-ew (oo)**	**-oo (oo)**
dude	blue	few	too
huge	clue	dew	zoo
rube	due	drew	zoom
cube	duel	screw	broom
mule	cruel	crew	noon
tune	glue	threw	spoon
duke	hue	blew	soon
use	rue	brew	tooth
rule	Sue	slew	boot
cute	true	new	hoot
dune	fuel	chew	groom

Figure 5.5 (cont'd)

ACTIVITY Short to Long

To demonstrate the differences between long and short vowels, write on the board a list of words with short vowels that can be changed into different words with long vowels by adding the letter *e* to the end. Below is a list of some common words that can be changed in this manner. Have students make a list of these kinds of words and display them on the walls of the classroom for occasional review or to add new words as warranted.

hat–hate
tap–tape
can–cane
rip–ripe
din–dine
cut–cute
mop–mope
rob–robe
rag–rage
bit–bite
rid–ride
dim–dime
fin–fine
slop–slope
bad–bade
cop–cope
tub–tube
win–wine
mad–made
rod–rode
rat–rate
glob–globe
not–note
plan–plane
shin–shine
slid–slide
cod–code
not–note
quit–quite
tap–tape
kit–kite
man–mane
car–care
pin–pine
fat–fate
bath–bathe
glad–glade
strip–stripe
pal–pale

VOWEL DIGRAPHS AND DIPHTHONGS

A vowel digraph is the combination of two vowels (graphemes) to represent a single phoneme or sound. The most common vowel digraphs in English are *aw, au, oo, ew, ue,* and *ui.* Two of the digraphs, *ew* and *ue,* contain the long /u/ sound and have already been discussed as part of the spelling pattern for that sound. A third digraph, *ui* appears with such infrequency (*suit, fruit,* etc.) that it's best to treat words that contain it as sight words. This leaves three of the most common vowel digraphs: *oo, aw,* and *au.*

Two of the digraphs—*aw* and *au*—have the same sound, and *oo* has two distinct sounds: the /oo/ as in *foot* and the /oo/ as in *soon.* Although the generalizations for each sound, like most generalizations, are not always

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consistent or reliable, they could be of value to students who might be confused about how to spell and write words that contain these sounds, especially the *au* and *aw* sound. Certainly the teacher should be aware of them.

Generalizations for *aw* and *au*

See figure 5.6 for examples for words containing these digraphs.

1. The digraph *au* is generally used at the beginning of some words and in the middle of many others. It is not used at the end of words.
2. The digraph *aw* is generally found at the end of a word. When it is not at the end of the word, it often occurs before the letters *k*, *l*, and *n*.

Words with *aw* and *au*

aw	au
saw	cause
jaw	pause
paw	caught
straw	daughter
law	auto
lawn	August
claw	author
draw	autumn
crawl	because
raw	saucer
dawn	fault
hawk	Paul

Figure 5.6

The Digraph *oo*

There are no generalizations regarding the digraph *oo*. A word that contains this digraph can be pronounced in one of two ways: with the long /oo/ as in *loose* and *boot* or with the short /oo/ as in *hook* and *stood*. No positional clues exist that can be used to direct the student to one pronunciation or the other. Students will need practice discriminating sounds, but it is in the context in which the word is used that they will discover the proper pronunciation. Figure 5.7 contains examples of words with both pronunciations.

Words with *oo*

long /oo/ sound	short /oo/ sound
too	took
pool	stood
zoo	look
loop	cook
noon	shook
shoot	brook
tool	book
boost	foot
loose	good
root	wood
tooth	football

Figure 5.7

ACTIVITY Commercial Games

Many popular games on the market today can be helpful in developing awareness of sounds in words and various spelling patterns for those sounds. These commercial games include "Scrabble," "Hangman," "Word Bingo," and jigsaw puzzles for various age groups. "The Phonics Game" contains many different card games that can make learning vowel sounds enjoyable. These types of educational games are great to have around the classroom, especially when students cannot go outside for recess or when they have some free time.

Diphthongs

A diphthong is a combination of two vowel sounds, the first gliding into the second to produce one blended sound: the *oi* as in *boil* and the *ou* as in *house*, for example. There are four "pure" diphthongs: *ou, oy, oi,* and *ow*. While the diphthongs *oi* and *oy* are always pronounced alike, the diphthongs *ou* and *ow* are sometimes pronounced alike and sometimes not. The diphthong *ou* is pronounced the same as *ow* in words such as *count, loud, hour,* etc., but it can have another seven sounds in words such as *touch, soup, soul, bought, could,* and *famous*. Despite this last problem, a few generalizations or observations about diphthongs can be pointed out that may be helpful in spelling and writing these sounds.

Generalizations About Diphthongs

See figure 5.8 for examples of words containing the "pure" diphthongs.

1. When the sound /oi/ /oy/ is heard at the end of a word, it is generally spelled *oy* (*toy, boy, destroy,* etc.). When the sound is heard in the middle of a word, or in a closed position, it is generally spelled *oi* (*boil, noise, voice,* etc.).
2. When the /ow/ /ou/ sound is heard at the end of a word, it is almost always spelled *ow* (*cow, plow,* etc.).

Words with Vowel Diphthongs

ou	**ow**	**oi**	**oy**
house	cow	oil	boy
mouse	how	boil	enjoy
count	plow	soil	toy
found	chow	foil	destroy
round	drown	join	Troy
ground	brown	coin	coy
loud	clown	point	alloy
cloud	crowd	choice	Roy
shout	owl	voice	joy
trout	growl	noise	ploy
bounce	prowl	moist	decoy
hour	browse	coil	cowboy

Figure 5.8

R-CONTROLLED VOWEL SOUNDS

When a vowel is followed by *r*, the sound is neither long nor short, but has a distinctive sound controlled by the *r*. By the time students reach the point where they may need instruction or practice with words that have a vowel followed by *r*, they have probably already learned many common words that fit this category, such as *her, farm, bird, girl,* etc. They probably learned these words with little or no difficulty and without anyone calling their attention to how the *r* affects the vowel sound. They ought to be able to use and apply that knowledge to other words they may not know that contain a vowel plus *r*. Calling students' attention to certain generalizations regarding vowels plus *r* in

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the early stages of reading, although certainly not necessary for learning how to read, might be of some benefit down the line.

Generalizations for *R*-Controlled Vowels

1. In many words a vowel followed by an *r* is long when there is a final *e* at the end of the word: *wire, cure, care,* etc. When the word does not have a final *e*, it is usually short: *bird, her, car,* etc.
2. When *ar, er, ir,* and *ur* are followed by a second *r* the vowel is usually short: *sparrow, error, mirror,* etc.
3. When a vowel plus *r* is followed by another vowel, it is usually short: *very, merit, miracle,* etc.

Some of the more frequent *r*-controlled vowels are listed in figure 5.9. These may be used for board work or seat work exercises.

Words with *R*-Controlled Vowels

ar	er	or	ir	ur
car	her	for	bird	burn
march	perk	born	girl	burst
hard	fern	cork	third	churn
large	stern	fork	shirt	curl
mark	herd	north	firm	fur
park	were	corn	dirt	hurl
harm	germ	lord	first	hurt
farm	serve	horn	birth	nurse
charm	term	fort	irk	purr
harp	perch	horse	fir	spur
star	clerk	short	sir	turn
tar	ever	torn	flirt	churn

Figure 5.9

ACTIVITY Word Detective at Home

Here, the teacher might want to play word detective by giving students a chance to find vowel digraphs and diphthongs in one of their textbooks and make a list. For a good home activity, ask students to go home and survey the family newspaper to find words that contain certain diphthongs or digraphs. Have dad and mom assist, if they want. Students should make a list of the words they find and bring them to the classroom the next day to share with the class. Have the class make a general list and illustrate it with pictures that represent the words. The illustrated list can be displayed in the classroom.

ACTIVITY Mind Reading

Consider playing mind reading with the class. Get up in front of the class and give students two clues to the word you are thinking of. Begin by saying something like "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with *glue* and is not a falsehood." "I am thinking of something that has *ur* in the middle and is a very slow animal." After directing the activity a couple of times you may hand a student a list of words you want to review. The student chooses a word from the list and gives two clues to the class. The first to get the correct answer receives the list and chooses the next word, and so on.

HOMONYMS

A homonym (a more exact term is homophone) is a word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning and spelling. Consideration of homonyms at this point is logical because, with the exception of a few words, most of the problems with homonyms come from trying to determine which alternative spelling of the vowel is appropriate in a particular written usage (Furness 1990).

One of the peculiarities of English is that it contains pairs of words (homographs) that can be spelled exactly the same (*row–row, read–read, object–object,* etc.) but differ in meaning and pronunciation. At the same time, other words (homophones or homonyms) have the same pronunciation but are spelled differently with entirely different meanings (*to–too–two, blew–blue, so–sew,* etc.). In the first instance, one cannot tell just by looking at the word which meaning to use; in the second instance, one cannot tell just from the pronunciation what word to write. Even after many years of schooling, it is not uncommon for literate adults to habitually confuse spellings of homonyms, writing *there* instead of *their* or writing *to* for *too.*

Homonyms, near homonyms, and words that contain unnecessary silent letters are the basis of spelling demon lists and present a real challenge for teacher and students. There is just no logical way for the student to learn these words except to become aware of the more common ones and to practice spelling them and using them in conversation and writing. Figure 5.10 is a list of some of the more common homonyms met by students in the early elementary grades. It is extremely important for students' educational advancement and self-esteem that they learn not only how to spell these words but also how to use them properly in written sentences. Being able to spell and write these words in proper context is a sure sign of spelling and writing accomplishment.

Common Homonyms

to–too–two
I–eye
ate–eight
know–no
son–sun
which–witch
die–dye
days–daze
pair–pare
night–knight
do–due–dew
feet–feat
there–their
dear–deer
so–sew–sow
week–weak
reign–rain
write–right
way–weigh
by–buy–bye
cellar–seller
cent–sent
bare–bear
made–maid
hear–here
red–read
see–sea
beet–beat
air–heir
hour–our
sail–sale
lead–led
pail–pale
be–bee
ant–aunt
one–won
blue–blew
flower–flour
new–knew
for–four
misses–Mrs.
cell–sell
seem–seam
meat–meet
principal–principle
peace–piece
break–brake
some–sum

Figure 5.10

ACTIVITY Missing Homonyms

Homonyms generally do not pose as much of a problem in reading as they do in spelling. Many adults still write *to* for *too, principal* for *principle, break* for *brake,* and so forth. For this reason it is good to give the students plenty of written work along with their reading material. Many teachers will reproduce sentences that have the homonym removed. Students are to supply the proper word. For example:

John ____________ what he was doing. (new, knew)

She was told to wait one ____________. (hour, our)

Dad would like to ____________ some bread. (by, buy, bye)

Mr. Smith is a nice ____________. (principle, principal)

The children put ________ books over ____________. (there, their)

ACTIVITY Homonym Pictures

Drawing pictures to represent homonyms is also a challenge. Let students use their imagination to produce pictures to illustrate the differences between the two words. They might draw a picture of someone's hair and a hare running in the field. They might draw a picture of a pile of books with the caption "their books" and a picture of a boy standing in the corner with the caption "standing there in the corner." Challenge students to draw one picture that illustrates both homonyms: "Their books are over there in the corner." "Hey! That hare has hair!" Collect the students' word pictures and display them in the classroom.

SIGHT WORDS

Sight words are words that, because of some kind of irregularity in spelling or pronunciation, are thought to be better learned by sight, rather than trying to sound them out phonemically. About two hundred of the most common words used in English (*the, two, done, gone, are, have,* etc.) fit into this category, yet they make up about two-thirds of the words used in print (Furness 1990).

A student can learn to recognize all kinds of consistent spelling patterns and all kinds of rules and generalizations that may assist him or her in learning new words, yet there comes a time when spelling patterns and generalizations fail. Patterns and rules simply cannot help the student pronounce common words such as *laugh, love, one, two, said,* etc. In fact, attempting to apply rules to irregular words is one of the reasons good readers are sometimes poor spellers, whereas good spellers are rarely poor readers.

Aside from their irregularities, there is another reason to learn many words as sight words: while these words are common, they are so often misspelled they require some special attention. Particular idiosyncrasies of each word, such as double letters, silent letters, and unconventional spellings, should be pointed

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out. If necessary, students should be given special practice or opportunities to write these words. Whereas invented spellings may be helpful during writing assignments so students can get their ideas on paper, eventually they will have to confront their difficulties with conventional spelling. Invented spelling should be only a temporary solution.

ACTIVITY Around the World

A popular way to help children learn sight words quickly is to play Around the World. This activity can be used to learn number facts and the multiplication tables as well as sight words. Print words you want the students to learn on cards large enough for the students to see at a short distance. Hold the pile in your hand so that only the top card is exposed. If the classroom is arranged in rows, start with the first student in the first row. If the classroom is arranged irregularly, line the students up single file at the front of the room. Ask the first student to stand next to the second student. Flash the first card. Whichever student says the word first advances to the next student in line. If students are playing at their desks, the one who does not advance sits down at the desk. Flash another word, and again whoever says it first advances. The object of the game is to be the first person to return to his or her original position—to go around the world.

CONCLUSION

From the contents of this chapter the reader can easily discern how complicated the process of teaching reading by using the sound-symbol system can be. As we have seen in the last chapter, consonants are somewhat regular while "the conduct of vowels is just plain disorderly" (Adams 1998, 118). Yet aside from a complete alphabet reform there is no way of getting around learning the vowels. There are only six primary vowels, but they appear in every word and syllable in the language and they account for roughly 39 percent of the character space in English (Mayzner and Tresselt 1966).

Whereas only a couple of consonants have more than one sound, every single one of the vowels, by itself or in combination with another vowel (vowel digraph), can take on many different vowel sounds. A beginning teacher focusing on just this aspect of phonics might become quickly discouraged at the prospect.

However, although vowel sounds are many and varied, they are nonetheless highly consistent within certain patterns. Through practice with phonograms

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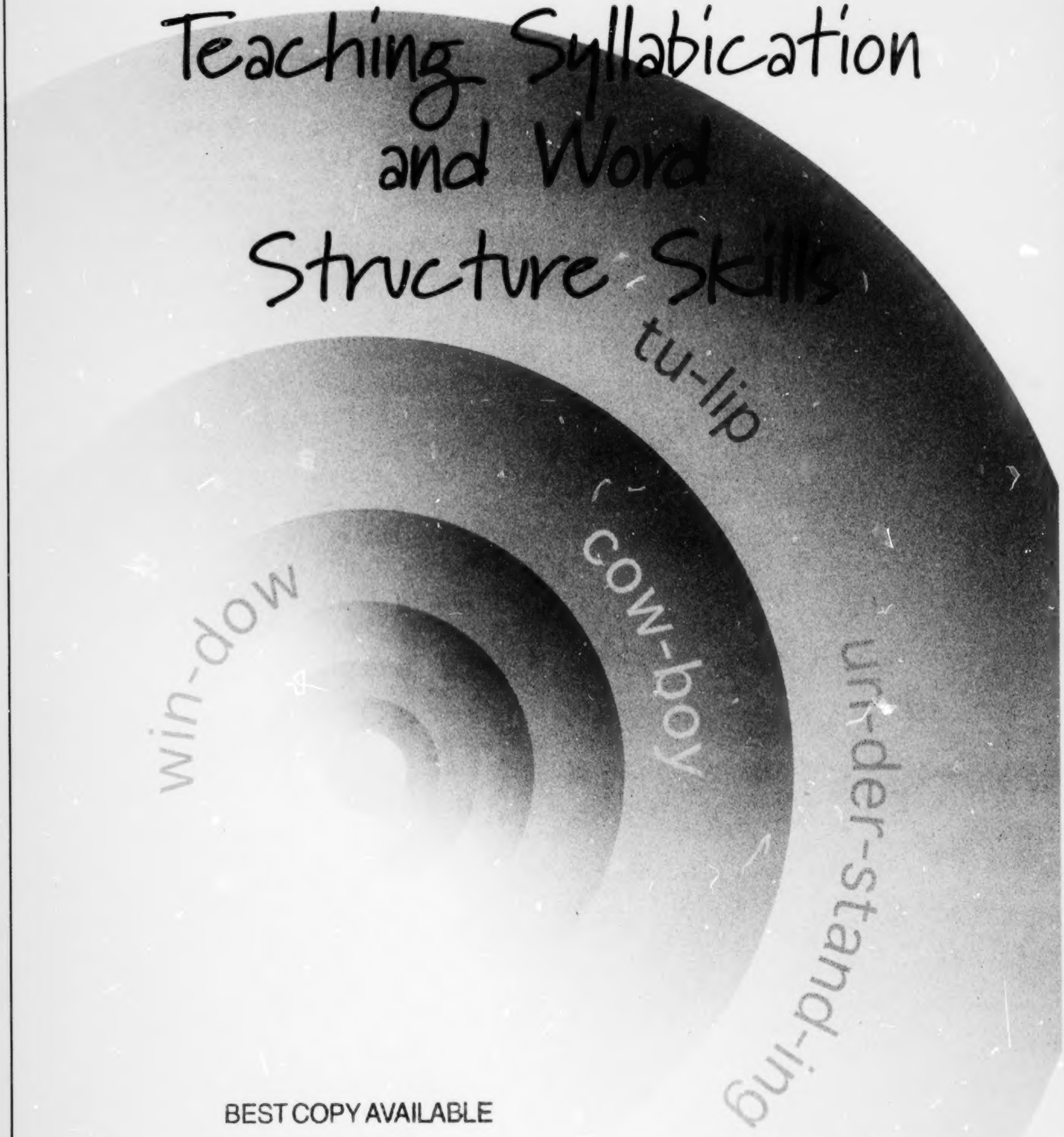
or word families and familiarity with the examples in this chapter, students can learn basic skills in sounding out and spelling vowels that will help them read and spell and figure out more advanced and less familiar words.

When students reach the point where they are ready for instruction in the more advanced vowel sounds, they will have already been exposed to sounds that will lay the foundation, have a more advanced active and passive vocabulary, and have had plenty of previous practice. Previous mastery of one skill makes it easier to master more advanced skills and understandings. The more practice and exposure students receive, the more they have the tendency to internalize these rules or skills, the faster they can process print, and the more they concentrate on meaning rather than pronunciation (Adams 1998).

If nothing else, this chapter demonstrates the importance of teaching reading, spelling, and writing together for the sake of reinforcement. Most of the mistakes students make in spelling or writing have to do with vowel sounds. This is seen regularly in students' attempts at invented spelling. That's why it is essential to attempt to integrate the examples in this chapter as much as possible into the regular spelling class and find activities and games that involve all three disciplines. The language arts should be taught in such a way that all three reinforce each other.

Chapter 6

Teaching Syllabication and Word Structure Skills


tu-lip
win-dow
cow-boy
un-der-stand-ing

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The first words a child learns to read are generally one-syllable singular nouns (*dog, house, moon,* etc.) and present-tense verbs (*look, run, come,* etc.). It doesn't take very long, however, before beginning readers encounter longer and more complicated words (*arithmetic, geography, Washington,* etc.), together with changes both at the beginning and ending of the word that alter the word's meaning in some way (*boy–boys, look–looking, happy–unhappy,* etc.). Later on, as the student advances from reader to reader or grade to grade, the words become ever more involved and complicated, both in structure and meaning. Generally, it is not until about the fourth grade that "normal readers begin to perceive syllables more quickly and accurately than single letters" (Freidrich et al. 1979, cited in Adams 1998, 125).

The first time students use a computer for anything other than games, they are handicapped by the fact that using a computer means learning a "new" language with a strange vocabulary all its own (*database, spreadsheet,* etc.). If they want to do more than just punch keys and move a mouse, they are forced to learn this strange language. When students look at a map of the United States, they find myriad strange-sounding words such as *Menominee, Okeechobee, Kalamazoo, Tallahassee, Chiricahua,* and hundreds of other polysyllabic names of towns and cities. When students attempt to read the directions on how to assemble parts of a kite or look up the football scores in the local newspapers, again they face special challenges with longer technical and unfamiliar words. Their ability mentally to divide words into syllables and to sound them out is key to their ability to read and pronounce this challenging new vocabulary. Because of their knowledge of spelling patterns, "skilled readers break long words down into syllabic units. They do so automatically and in the very course of perceiving them" (Adams 1998).

THE NEED FOR SYLLABICATION SKILLS

The word challenge never seems to stop. The more exposure students have to reading material, and the more they develop their reading skills, the more complicated the words become both in structure and meaning. Without the ability to mentally divide words into syllables in order to get to the pronunciation (or at least the approximate pronunciation), little progress would be made in reading (Adams 1998).

The ability to divide unfamiliar words into syllables is not only a necessary tool for children; it plays an important part in adult learning as well. When learning a foreign language, for example, the ability to divide new words into syllables in order to sound them out is essential. When a teacher takes the roll call for the first time of the new students in her classroom, her only clue to how to pronounce some of their names is to (mentally) divide the name into syllables and hope for the best.

Not only do foreign languages and computers have a language all their own, but so do medicine, law, religion, science, and most other areas of learning. Although the average person requires knowledge of only several thousand of words for writing, and perhaps another 10,000 to 20,000 more for reading, the English language has 600,000 words and proper names (Furness 1990). As one linguist put it, this abundance of "scientific, legal, technical, artistic, and philosophical terms makes English the richest and most expansive tongue on the world" (Furness 1990, 67). To be knowledgeable and fluent in these areas we must first master the vocabulary. And to master the vocabulary, we must be able to read it.

RULES FOR DIVIDING WORDS INTO SYLLABLES

As has been stated several times before, English has so few high-percentage phonemic rules or generalizations that it is generally a bad idea to require children to memorize them (Clymer 1963). When it comes to the rules for dividing words into syllables, however, one might consider making an exception. Unlike most of the other rules and generalizations we have seen, rules for dividing words into syllables are very consistent, can be easily learned, and, with practice, can become internalized without a great deal of stress or frustration. If memorization of these rules still seems like a bad idea, then the teacher should, at least, provide the class with enough experiences and practice so that the rules become internalized over a period of time.

Learning the rules and getting sufficient practice applying them teaches much more than just the sounds of the words. Students are also learning to look at the structure of the English language and how words are put together. They learn not only how vowels and consonants affect the sounds of words, but also about root words and how prefixes and suffixes change the meaning of words. They are exposed to tense changes in English and inflectional endings, which will ultimately help them write more grammatically accurate sentences and

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assist in developing better spelling habits. Certainly, it is important that students learn and become familiar with the principles underlying these rules.

Syllabication Rules and Examples

1. There are as many syllables as there are vowel sounds. It is the vowel sound that is important, not the number of vowels. For example, the word *pan* has one vowel and one vowel sound. The word *pain* has two vowels and only one vowel sound. *Cheese* has three vowels and one sound.
2. Compound words are divided between the two words: *sun-shine, cow-boy, basket-ball,* etc. If further division is necessary, then they follow the general rules below.
3. Divide syllables between double consonants (VC-CV): *Sun-day, run-ner, tar-dy,* etc.
4. When a single consonant comes between two vowels and the first vowel is long, the consonant generally goes with the second vowel (V-CV): *pa-per, so-ber, tu-lip,* etc.
5. When a single consonant comes between two vowels and the first vowel is short, the consonant generally goes with the first vowel (VC-V): *cab-in, met-al, col-or,* etc.
6. When a word ends in *-ble, -cle, -dle, -gle, -kle, -ple, -tle,* or *-zle,* this combination forms the final syllable: *an-kle, can-dle, amica-ble,* etc.
7. When a word contains a consonant blend or digraph, keep the combination together when dividing the word: *ma-chines, teach-er, coun-try,* etc.
8. One-syllable prefixes and suffixes generally form a separate syllable: *re-new, un-like-ly, pre-heat-ed,* etc.

The rules above are fairly consistent and can be internalized by the students with additional practice and review every now and then.

Figures 6.1–6.8 contain groupings of familiar words to which each rule applies. Students may use these lists to practice dividing words into syllables. After reviewing these words, in order to insure that the class receives sufficient practice seeing how the rules apply, follow up by having the students discover other words from their textbooks, newspapers, or magazines that follow the rules. Syllabication rules can also be put to good use in spelling lessons.

Once students learn the rules, the teacher might encourage them to invent their own words for practice. Dividing nonsense words, such as *tackatokie,* *ambridorcodill,* or *unfestatoral,* into syllables can be a challenging way to practice this skill. Locating four-, five-, and six-syllable words in newspapers and magazines can also be helpful. Giving a prize to the student who finds the longest word in the newspaper is another way of promoting curiosity about words and their meanings. Dividing words into syllables need not be an onerous task.

Rule 1: There are as many syllables as there are vowel sounds. Generally, when an e appears at the end of a word it is silent. Generally, when two vowels come together, they produce only one vowel sound.

I = one vowel, one sound

Have = two vowels, one sound

Teacher = three vowels, two sounds

Understanding = four vowels, four sounds

Hydrophobia = five vowels, five sounds

Figure 6.1

Rule 2: Compound words are divided between the two words.

sand-box
dog-house
life-boat
green-house
shell-fish
bird-house
rain-bow
in-door
spot-light
air-plane
life-time
out-field
black-bird

blue-bird
road-way
frost-bite
wild-cat
cook-book
pan-cake
moon-light
drug-store
house-boat
wish-bone
door-bell
pig-tail
down-town

book-mark
eye-lid
fire-wood
sail-boat
sun-light
hard-ball
wind-mill
wash-room
farm-house
key-hole
hay-stack
tip-toe
tooth-pick

ant-hill
air-line
short-stop
grand-ma
note-book
water-fall
side-walk
fire-fly
bath-room
lock-out
foot-ball
gold-fish
sun-light

Figure 6.2

Rule 3: Divide syllables between double consonants.

let-ter
an-gel
sup-per
in-sect
bar-rel
mit-ten
dad-dy
sug-gest
fun-ny
val-ley
lad-der
gar-den

con-tact
tur-nip
can-dy
her-mit
run-ner
dol-lar
cop-per
rub-ber
cir-cus
car-rot
pic-nic
sil-ly

cen-ter
mar-vel
ar-my
swim-mer
un-der
el-bow
cor-ner
don-key
har-bor
but-ton
les-son
car-go

tar-dy
pen-cil
part-ner
bas-ket
doc-tor
lit-tle
sil-ver
wal-rus
chim-ney
rib-bon
gram-mar
nap-kin

Figure 6.3

Rule 4: When a single consonant comes between two vowels and the first vowel is long, the single consonant generally goes with the second vowel.

lo-cal
o-pen
tu-lip
ha-zel
po-ny
gro-cer
ti-dy
hu-mor
la-dy
pi-rate

be-gan
ro-ver
so-da
va-cate
li-lac
clo-ver
ti-ger
a-gent
la-bor
be-gin

A-pril
so-lar
fi-nal
mo-tor
ze-bra
fe-male
fe-ver
I-vy
fi-ner
vo-ter

pa-per
cra-zy
o-ver
Chi-na
vi-tal
se-cret
ma-ple
dri-ver
wi-per
vo-cal

Figure 6.4

Rule 5: When a single consonant comes between two vowels and the first vowel is short, the consonant generally goes with the first vowel.

doz-en
vis-it
sev-en
lem-on
nev-er
bod-y
tow-el
met-al
hab-it
wag-on
fin-ish
lin-en
mod-el
ev-er
pris-on
cab-in
col-or
pan-el
jur-y
giv-ing
cit-y
riv-er
liz-ard
grav-el
driv-en
heav-en
prop-er
Sen-ate
civ-ic
clev-er
stud-y
at-om
bus-y
pan-ic
trav-el
vow-el
giv-en
liv-er
viv-id
ov-en

Figure 6.5

Rule 6: When a word ends in *-ble, -cle, -dle, -gle, -kle, -ple, -tle,* or *-zle,* this combination forms the final syllable.

ma-ple
lit-tle
drib-ble
nee-dle
noo-dle
un-cle
bat-tle
gen-tle
pur-ple
sim-ple
bu-gle
bub-ble
set-tle
cat-tle
han-dle
spar-kle
cir-cle
an-gle
cas-tle
crum-ble
muz-zle
an-kle
ta-ble
ap-ple
rat-tle
fraz-zle
grum-ble
daz-zle
hur-dle
trou-ble
pad-dle
waf-fle
fid-dle
ca-ble
dan-gle
ea-gle
peo-ple
min-gle
poo-dle
ri-fle
fiz-zle
bot-tle
gig-gle
han-dle

Figure 6.6

Rule 7: When a word contains a consonant blend or digraph, keep the combination together when dividing the word.

teach-er
im-ply
in-struct
chil-dren
An-drew
sur-prise
mo-ther
coun-try
hun-dred
dis-play
im-prove
con-clude
de-gree
ex-treme
weath-er
meth-od
cel-e-brate
sub-tract
En-glish
broth-er
preach-er
sim-pler
re-strict
in-ter-pret
pro-gram
noth-ing
ma-chine
de-ploy
re-place
im-plore
ham-ster
ath-lete
im-press
se-cret
Pil-grims
wheth-er
a-gree
sam-pler
tel-e-scope
feath-er

Figure 6.7

Rule 8: One-syllable prefixes and suffixes generally form a separate syllable.

pro-noun
thick-ness
un-like-ly
quick-ness
pro-tect-ing
mis-use
un-trust-ing
art-ful-ness
land-ed
ex-plore
im-plant
re-ac-tion
home-less
un-do
mid-way
pre-view
un-grate-ful
care-ful-ly
co-ed
mis-place
pro-long
fore-cast
glow-ing-ly
mid-night
de-cod-ing
dis-taste-ful
pay-ment
un-friend-ly
ill-ness
un-wise
dent-ist
dress-es
poor-ly
non-sense
hav-ing
dis-trust

Figure 6.8

It is important to give all students enough practice dividing words into syllables so that they can apply the skill when necessary. For young children just beginning to read, some exposure to these rules, as the need occurs, is generally sufficient. For more advanced students and older students who may need extra help, taking time out every now and then to discuss specific rules and giving them words to practice can be very helpful. As has been pointed out before, learning syllabication skills not only helps children learn the sounds of words, but also allows the teacher opportunities to discuss such topics as parts of speech, root words, the meaning of prefixes and suffixes, and comparatives, superlatives, and possessives as these features occur in longer words. Discussions can become lively as students try to divide and sound out unfamiliar words such as *discombobulate* or *zoogeography*. Students soon learn there is more to words than just sounds.

ACTIVITY Dictionary Search

Pass out a dictionary to each member of the class and ask them who can find the longest word. Give them a few minutes and then discuss the words they've found. You might ask students to find ten words with eight or more letters and write them down. Again after a period of time stop and discuss the words. Variations would be to find words with four, five, or six syllables. As an after-school activity you might ask the students to go home that night and find the longest word they can in the newspaper and write the sentence in which it appears. The words, their pronunciation, and their meaning could be discussed in class the next morning.

ACTIVITY Word Wall

Appoint a different student each day to write on a classroom wall board one polysyllabic word he or she discovers in the course of the school day. The students would likely add words like ***geography, arithmetic, multiplication, Mississippi***, etc. At the end of the week discuss the words on the wall chart.

PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

One of the major clues for unlocking polysyllabic words is knowledge of prefixes and suffixes and how they affect the meanings of words. A prefix is defined as a syllable or syllables added to the beginning of a word to change

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its meaning (*new–renew, happy–unhappy,* etc.). A suffix is defined as a syllable or syllables added to the ending of a word to change its meaning (*girl–girls, poor–poorly, good–goodness,* etc.). A prefix added to a word makes it a new word, often with a quite different or even opposite meaning (*happy–unhappy, obey–disobey,* etc.). Suffixes added to the ending of a word can also change the meaning of the root word (*hope–hopeless, teach–teacher,* etc.). More often, however, suffixes change the grammatical function of the word (*do–doing, happy–happily,* etc.). Knowledge of the meanings of prefixes and suffixes not only assists in the structural analysis of words and syllabication, but is also a great help for improving comprehension and spelling skills.

Unfortunately for elementary teachers, English contains such an abundance of both prefixes and suffixes that it is almost impossible and certainly impractical to expose children to a large proportion of them. Fortunately, most prefixes and sufixes are so rare they can be discarded as meaningless at this level. Fry et al. give examples of almost 150 different prefixes and 90 different suffixes (Fry et al. 1993). Many of the prefixes—such as *giga-* (billion), *tetra-* (four), and *ennea-* (nine)—are rare, as are many of the suffixes. So rare are they that it's doubtful whether many educated adults would be able to identify and explain even half these affixes.

Students are exposed at a very early level to words such as *unhappy, going, remake,* and others that have a prefix or suffix. As they progress in reading ability they are exposed to more involved prefixes and suffixes. At times they will ask questions about additions or they will need some instruction from their teacher.

It is important that the teacher point out to students that not all words that start with what looks like a prefix do indeed have one—the *un-* in *uncle,* the *re-* in *relative,* and the *mis-* in *mission,* for example. In fact, about fifteen to twenty percent of the words students encounter in reading share this complexity (White et al. 1989). Teachers should also point out different prefixes can express the same meaning. For example, *in-, im-, ir-,* and *il-* can mean *not; contra-* and *anti-* mean *against; bi-* and *di-* mean *two.* These fine distinctions, however, need not be presented until the student is ready. They can be held off until the later grades—three, four, five, and beyond.

Figures 6.9 and 6.10 contain lists of the twenty most common prefixes and suffixes, based on the *American Heritage Word Frequency Book* (Carrol et al. 1971). They are listed in order of frequency.

Common Prefixes

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
un-	not	unhappy, unlike
re-	again	renew, retry, redo
in-, im-, ir-, il-	not	inactive, impossible, irregular, illegal
dis-	opposite of	distrust, disobey
en-, em-	cause to	enclose, embrace
non-	not, not one	nonsense, nonactive
in-, im-	into	inhale, implant
over-	too much	overstate, overkill
mis-	bad	misspell, mislay
sub-	under	submerge, subject
pre-	before	preplan, prepay
inter-	between	interstate, intersect
fore-	before	forethought, foregone
de-	opposite of	debase, detoxify
trans-	across	transport, transmit
super-	excess, above	superman, supervise
semi-	half	semipublic, semicircle
anti-	against	antiwar, antibody
mid-	middle	midyear, midtown
under-	too little	underdone, undercook

Figure 6.9

When to Teach Prefixes and Suffixes

There is no exact order in which prefixes and suffixes ought to be taught. Rather than just teaching them for the sake of teaching them, however, it would be more practical and timely to wait until there is a particular need and the timing seems appropriate. For example, after the student (or reading group) finishes reading a story that contains several common prefixes, the teacher might take a little time to talk about the role of prefixes and suffixes. Using the examples the student just read in the book, and with their meanings

Common Suffixes

Suffix	Meaning	Examples
-s, -es	more than one	cats, foxes
-ed (-/d/, -/t/)	past tense	snowed, looked
-ing	verb ending	going, singing
-ly	like	nicely, joyfully
-er, -or	one who does	singer, actor
-tion, -sion	state of	action, division
-able, -ible	capable of	loveable, sensible
-al, -ial	pertaining to	musical, racial
-y	quality of	fruity, rainy
-ness	condition of	sadness, goodness
-ity, -ty	quality of	eternity, safety
-ment	action or process	judgment, development
-ic	pertaining to	phonetic, comic
-ous, -ious	having quality of	humorous, mysterious
-en	become, made of	darken, wooden
-er	comparative	nicer, softer
-ive	state of being	active, attractive
-ful	full of	delightful, helpful
-less	without	sugarless, mindless
-est	superlative	highest, kindest

Figure 6.10

still fresh in mind, the teacher would then have a great opportunity to present other words the student may or may not know that have similar prefixes and suffixes. Teaching concepts about similar prefixes and suffixes when the opportunity presents itself makes the teaching more relevant and the learning more likely to be retained and applied.

Specific instruction on the meanings of certain prefixes and suffixes and how these additions change the meaning of words can be given in most areas of the curriculum. In a geography class, for example, students might read how Magellan *circumnavigated* the globe. This could lead to a discussion and investigation of the prefix *circum-* and its meaning. Other words, such as *circumstance, circumscribe, circulation,* and their meanings, could be brought up in the discussion to further understanding of this prefix. In English class the teacher might want to present specific lessons and exercises on how to form plurals (*boy–boys, box–boxes, lady–ladies,* etc.), or present lessons on comparatives and superlatives of adjectives (*tall–taller–tallest, small–smaller–smallest,* etc.), or practice the tenses of verbs (*walk–walked–walking, need–needed–needing,* etc.). (In these instances English class, rather than reading class, would be a more appropriate setting for teaching how prefixes and suffixes affect the meaning of words.) Math class offers all kinds of opportunities to present, talk about, and give examples of the many number and shape prefixes (*triangle, pentagon, diameter, circumference,* etc.).

Since so many common spelling mistakes (*pervent, loveing, nashun, runing,* etc.) are the result of a poor understanding of prefixes and suffixes and how they operate, it would be beneficial to spend several spelling classes going over the meanings and applications of the more common ones.

Rules for Suffixes

When adding a prefix to a word, generally no spelling changes are involved, no doubling of consonants, no changing letters to other letters, and virtually no rules or generalizations to be learned. This makes them quite a bit easier to learn and remember than suffixes, which get tangled up in generalizations and exceptions. The inability to handle suffixes is one of the major causes of spelling problems. It is not only important to spend time on suffixes in reading classes, but special practice and instruction must also be extended in spelling and language course work. Learning suffixes takes time and plenty of practice.

Below are some of the rules for adding suffixes to words. As with the suffixes themselves, the rules may be taught or pointed out when the occasion presents itself.

1. When a word ends in *e*, drop the *e* before a suffix that begins with a vowel: *sale–salable, come–coming, nerve–nervous.* Exception: when the final *e* is preceded by *c* or *g*, the *e* is retained to preserve the soft sound: *peace–peaceable, change–changeable.*
2. When a word ends in *e*, keep the *e* before a suffix that begins with a consonant, *sure–surely, active–actively, care–careless.* Three common exceptions are *judgment, ninth,* and *truly.*

3. When a word ends in *y* preceded by a consonant, change the *y* to *i* before adding the suffix: *plenty–plentiful, glory–glorious, happy–happily.* Exception: do not change the *y* to *i* if the suffix begins with *i: carry–carrying.* Do not change the *y* to *i* if the *y* is preceded by a vowel: *joy–joyful.*
4. When a one-syllable word ends in a consonant preceded by a vowel, double the consonant: *run–runner, spin–spinner, bet–betting.* Exception: words with two vowels before the single consonant do not double the consonant: *seat–seated; rain–rained.*
5. When a word has more than one syllable, double the consonant only if the accent of the word is on the last syllable: *admit–admitted, compel–compelling, begin–beginning.* Exceptions to the rule include words that have two vowels before the single consonant (*repeat–repeated, defeat–defeated*) and words ending in two consonants *(result–resulting, hard–harder*). Words not accented on the last syllable do not double the consonant: *open–opened, benefit–benefited.*
6. When a word ends in *c* insert *k* to retain the hard sound of the *c* before adding a suffix that begins with *e, i,* or *y: picnic–picnicking, panic–panicking.*

ACTIVITY Prefix Puzzles

An activity that will help to teach prefixes and suffixes and how they change meaning is to have the students copy a list of words from the board that contains several different prefixes. Pass out strips of heavyweight construction paper. Have students copy the words onto the construction paper. Pass out scissors and then instruct students how and where to cut off the prefix from the root word. Have the students cut off the prefixes, mix the word parts up on their desk, and then put the prefixes back where they belong. Students will find they can create words not on the original list by switching prefixes. Have the students save the pieces in a large envelope. The next day add another five words with the same prefixes and have them do the same thing. Ask students to mix these new words with the old and then match prefixes with root words. Every once in a while add some new words to the mix.

Try the same activity with the suffixes. Students will find it more difficult to create new words because of the changes induced in the root words by the suffixes.

FORMING PLURALS

Today, when one looks at a highly inflectional language like Latin, with its seemingly endless lists of conjugations and declensions, one wonders how our grandparents ever got through those classes. One of the first lessons they learned was that Latin was not one bit like English in its structure. Whereas English is relatively free in its word order and with very few endings, Latin is very rigid and exact. Unlike English, where we only have to worry about singular and plural forms of the noun, those studying Latin have to learn that a noun can have four different types of endings, and that these endings change according to how the noun is used in the sentence. If the student of Latin gets over the hurdle of learning all these noun forms and changes, he or she is then confronted with the even more complicated changes to Latin verbs, which can seem almost impossible for the average student to learn and understand.

At the other extreme, English has few inflectional endings. A singular noun (*girl, house, cat*) is always spelled the same way whether it is the subject of the sentence, the object of the sentence, or the object of a preposition. The only time inflectional endings are added to nouns is to show plurality and possession: *The cats died. This is Mary's house.*

Although a few nouns in English have the same spelling for both the singular and plural forms (*deer, sheep, trout,* etc.) and a few words have irregular plurals (*foot–feet, woman–women, ox–oxen,* etc.), the vast majority of plurals are formed by adding either *-s* or *-es* to the singular ending (*boy–boys, cat–cats, branch–branches, dress–dresses,* etc.). Although these two plural endings are spelled with an *s*, they generally are pronounced as /z/. The only time *s* retains its /s/ sound is when it follows *f, k, p,* or *t* (*cliffs, bricks, lamps, pots,* etc.). Children are so used to words ending in *s* with the /z/ sound that they rarely need help with this observation.

Below are the generalizations for adding plural endings to words. Becoming aware of these generalizations, while not a great help in learning to read, is essential for correct spelling. So many of the simple spelling mistakes children and adults often make reflect a poor knowledge of these generalizations. Practice with these generalizations, while not a cure-all for most spelling problems, can go a long way toward developing better spelling practices and a more mature understanding of how our language operates.

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Generalizations for Forming Plurals

1. The plural of most nouns is formed by adding *-s* to the singular noun. The *s* has the sound of /s/ when preceded by *f, k, p,* or *t: lamps, cats, cliffs, books.* In all other cases the *s* has the sound of /z/: *cars, girls, trains.*
2. The plural of nouns that end in *ss, ch, sh,* and *x* is formed by adding *-es* to the ending of the word: *glasses, churches, dishes, foxes.*
3. When a noun ends in *y* preceded by a consonant, change the *y* to *i* and add *-es: flies, armies, skies.*
4. When a noun ends in *y* preceded by a vowel, generally add *-s* without changing the final *y* to *i: alleys, chimneys, forays, boys.*
5. When a noun ends in *o* preceded by a consonant, generally *-es* is added to form the plural: *cargoes, potatoes, tornadoes.*
6. When a noun ends in *f* or *fe,* often the *f* or *fe* is changed to *ves* to form the plural. This usually takes place when the *f* or *fe* is preceded by a long vowel or by *l: calves, shelves, lives, loaves.* Nouns ending in *ff* usually just add *-s.* Warning: Since this generalization has so many exceptions, it is a good idea to consult a dictionary when in doubt.

   Exceptions to the generalization include *belief–beliefs, brief–briefs, dwarf–dwarfs, proof–proofs, roof–roofs, chief–chiefs,* and *reef–reefs.*
7. Some nouns have irregular plural endings: *bison–bison, child–children, deer–deer, foot–feet, goose–geese, man–men, moose–moose, mouse–mice, tooth–teeth, woman–women, sheep–sheep, swine–swine,* etc.
8. Most nouns that come from a foreign language have become anglicized in pronunciation and form their plurals according to the generalizations above. Some words, however, form their plurals by retaining their foreign form. This is especially true of many words with Latin origins. Few of these words are likely to be encountered in elementary school reading materials. Some of the more common ones include *alumna–alumnae, alumnus–alumni, medium–media, datum–data, curriculum–curricula, oasis–oases, focus–foci, madame–mesdames, minimum–minima, maximum–maxima, vertebra–vertebrae, nucleus–nuclei.*

ACTIVITY Plural Practice

Since such variation exists in how plurals are formed, students will need a great deal of practice writing the various plural forms. You may from time to time want to put a list of nouns on the board or pass out a list to the class of words that end in *-s, -ss, -ch, -sh,* and *-x* and ask them to change these words into plurals. You may do the same with nouns ending in *-y,* having the students change *y* to *i* and add *-es.* Have them write original sentences using the plurals they have made. For future reference, consider placing these plural words with the endings underlined on a wall chart. When students learn to spell a word in a spelling lesson—*candy, dress, house,* etc.—you can point out what changes need to be made, if any, in learning the plural form. Students could be encouraged to learn both forms together. Write a story or a few sentences, or have students write a story, then ask students to rewrite it changing singulars to plurals and plurals to singular.

CONTRACTIONS

A contraction is two words written together with one or more letters missing. The missing letter or letters are replaced by an apostrophe. Since contractions result from major changes in the structure of the word, they should be taught as sight words or by other means, rather than trying to sound them out.

There are three general types of contractions: those involving simple verb forms with *not* (*aren't, won't, isn't*), those involving pronouns with verbs (*we're, it'll, you've*), and those where *-'s* or *-'d* stands for the verb *is, had, have,* or *would* (*she's, I'd, who's*). Students should be given enough practice using these words in written sentences so that they eventually became natural and pose few problems either in writing or spelling. Figures 6.11–6.13 give examples of common contractions.

Verb + n’t (not)

- aren’t (are not)
- can’t (can not)
- couldn’t (could not)
- didn’t (did not)
- doesn’t (does not)
- don’t (do not)
- hadn’t (had not)
- hasn’t (has not)
- haven’t (have not)
- isn’t (is not)
- shouldn’t (should not)
- wasn’t (was not)
- weren’t (were not)
- won’t (would not)
- wouldn’t (would not)

Figure 6.11

Pronoun + Shortened Verb

- we’re (we are)
- you’re (you are)
- they’re (they are)
- I’ll (I will, I shall)
- he’ll (he will)
- she’ll (she will)
- we’ll (we will)
- you’ll (you will)
- they’ll (they will)
- it’ll (it will)
- that’ll (that will)
- I’ve (I have)
- we’ve (we have)
- you’ve (you have)
- they’ve (they have)

Figure 6.12

-’s or -’d for Is, Have, Had, or Would

-’s (is, have)

- he’s (he is, he has)
- she’s (she is, she has)
- here’s (here is)
- it’s (it is)
- that’s (that is, that has)
- there’s (there is, there has)
- what’s (what is, what has)
- where’s (where is, where has)
- who’s (who is, who has)

-’d (had, would)

- I’d (I had, I would)
- he’d (he had, he would)
- she’d (she had, she would)
- we’d (we had, we would)
- you’d (you had, you would)
- they’d (they had, they would)
- that’d (that had, that would)
- there’d (there had, there would)

Figure 6.13

CONCLUSION

Next to learning the letters of the alphabet and associated sounds, the second most important skill students need to learn is how to divide words into syllables. Too many times a student who is insecure in reading will look at the first syllable of a polysyllabic word, and then guess the rest of the syllables. Such a student is apt to read *remember* for *reminder, important* for *importing, generals* for *generalizations,* etc. Other students just shake their head and don't try at all.

It is important that students learn a polysyllabic word is just a long word made up of sounds they probably already know or can figure out easily. Students do not necessarily have to learn the rules for dividing words into syllables as presented in this book. It is important, however, for them to learn and remember that every syllable must have a vowel sound. If students keep the vowels separated and the blends together, they have a good chance of coming close, or close enough, to the actual pronunciation to get the word correct.

Although the general rule should be to teach skills in the context of reading and as needed, it is a good idea now and then to set aside a specific time devoted just to teaching some of the skills in this chapter—a block of time for syllabication, a block of time for plurals, etc. Since syllabication and word analysis skills will have relevance for spelling and writing, it is also useful from time to time to tie these activities into one larger language arts project. Last, let us remember that even in the twenty-first century the old Latin adage, "Repetitio est mater studiorum" (Repetition is the mother of studies), still has meaning for teachers and students.

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Chapter 7

Reading Standards and Expectations

Visual perceptions are often mentally adju

The Roman Empire expanded to within the

Under the bridge lived a large fish that sw

The big dog ran to the boy. The boy saw h

The box is red. The box is deep. The box i

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Many reasons have been advanced to explain why such a high percentage of our students today are not developing good reading skills in school. Crowded classrooms, not enough money and materials, not enough time to teach the essentials, lack of preparation time, poor instructional techniques, administration indifference, and lack of parental involvement are among the many obstacles that have been reported by teachers. No doubt one or more of these factors can and do play a role in some children's failure to read.

On the other hand, in global terms, the United States spends tremendous amounts of money on education. U.S. teachers have more extensive training than those of many other lands. Class sizes are getting smaller, and the classrooms themselves, for the most part, are well-supplied and comfortable settings for learning. Yet, as Marilyn Adams pointed out: "Even as we come to realize this situation, we are confronted with statistics that the ability of our students to read advanced material is slowly but steadily declining; that among industrial nations, American students' reading achievement is average or even below" (Adams 1998, 28).

THE LITERACY PROBLEM

If parents were to judge education by the same standards they judge their local grocery store, they would, in many cases, inevitably conclude that they were not getting their money's worth, and take their business elsewhere. The growing ranks of home schoolers show that increasing numbers of parents are doing just that, and provide evidence of the lack of confidence many parents place in their public and parochial schools.

As far back as 1983 The National Commission on Excellence in Education issued a report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), that warned against "a rising tide of mediocrity" in our schools. The report spawned several educational changes. Instructional time in the classroom was increased, and time and efforts were dedicated to improving education at the local level. A major shortcoming of this effort, however, was that it was too general in nature and lacked focus on academic standards. As California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction later pointed out, "The desire to improve student achievement guided the effort, but it lacked a comprehensive, specific vision of what students actually need to know and be able to do" (California State Board of Education 1997, iv).

Nine years later the rising tide of mediocrity had not abated. In 1992, the National Assessment Governing Board in conjunction with the National Center for Educational Statistics tested more than 26,000 Americans above the age of 15. The questions had to do with practical matters that face people every day, such as making out deposit slips and understanding instructions given to jurors. Careful demographic samplings included statistically representative samples of males and females from all ethnic and racial groups and from a variety of geographic locations. The results were alarming: only 3 percent of those tested read at the advanced level. Extrapolating from the results of the adult testing, the researchers concluded that there were approximately forty-two million functionally illiterate adults in this country, and many million more who were near illiterate (Kirsch et al. 1998). Regarding that same study, *The New York Times* on December 9, 1998 ran a front page article with the headline "Study Shows that Half of the Adults in U.S. Can't Read or Handle Arithmetic." It went on to report that businesses lose between 25 and 30 billion dollars as a result of errors and accidents attributed to poor literacy (Celis 1998).

In 1996 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which provides the only ongoing survey of students' educational progress, issued the following findings for the nation, regions, and states:

- The average reading proficiency of twelfth graders declined significantly from 1992 to 1994. This decline was observed across a broad range of subgroups. Significant changes in average proficiency were not observed in the national population of fourth and eighth graders.
- The percentage of twelfth-grade students who reached the "proficient" level in reading declined from 1992 to 1994. There was also a decline in the percentage of twelfth graders at or above the "basic" level.
- In 1994, 30 percent of fourth graders, 30 percent of eighth graders, and 36 percent of twelfth graders attained the "proficient" level in reading. Across the three grades, 3 to 7 percent reached the "advanced" level.
- The decline in overall reading proficiency in twelfth grade was evident in all three assessed purposes for reading: reading for literary experience, reading to gain information, and reading to perform a task.
- In 1994, fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students attending nonpublic schools displayed higher average reading proficiencies than did their counterparts attending public schools (Campbell et al. 1996).

It is becoming more and more apparent to educators and parents that the inability to read in this world of complex technology is literally dooming many Americans to the role of second-class citizenship. Marilyn Adams writes, "The future of our country depends on the extent to which it can be competitively productive within the world's economy. It depends, in other words, on the excellence of its populace as a whole. It is imperative that we strengthen our children's literacy skills" (Adams 1998).

THE STANDARDS MOVEMENT

To reverse these disturbing trends in literacy, new efforts and initiatives are now being advanced at national and state levels to permanently cure perceived educational deficiencies. Goals 2000, the first federal education act, which aimed to raise educational standards in urban school districts by increasing parental and community involvement in education, was passed in Congress on a bipartisan basis (Goals 2000 1994). The America Reads Challenge was a grassroots call to action by President Clinton. This national campaign challenged every American to help our children, including those with disabilities and limited English, learn to read. More than 250 organizations and one thousand colleges and universities joined the coalition for the America Reads Challenge.

Alongside these national endeavors, state boards of education in California, Colorado, Florida, Texas, and Virginia, determined to improve reading scores, have started new and intensive reading initiatives that spell out specific standards detailing what should be taught and learned at each grade level. Other states are initiating similar efforts.

Although much of this is happening at the national and state level and is being filtered down to local school districts, these initiatives are not coming from the top only, but rather are the result of the cooperation and approval of teachers at every grade level. Most state initiatives have taken several years of intense planning, with regional meetings across the state, so that the standards are arrived at as a result of a consensus of thousands of parents, teachers, administrators, businesspeople, and community leaders.

Veteran educators may remember various initiatives to improve reading on the local, state, and national levels that have occurred periodically and, while they hope for the best, their past experiences caution them not to hope too much.

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After all, standards are nothing new; they have been around as long as teachers have been around.

On the other hand, just about everyone agrees a need for new initiatives exists. They also agree that there is no better time to start than now. No miracle cures are on the horizon, but teachers and educational authorities strongly believe reading scores can and must be improved.

WHAT ARE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS?

Educational standards can be defined as the skills students are expected to achieve at certain stages of their school career. The standards, according to a report from the Florida Department of Education,

> don't tell a teacher how or what to teach. Nor are they lesson plans. They are only guidelines that tell teachers and parents what students are expected to know. . . . The standards provide a comfort level to parents because they make clear what students are expected to learn in each subject at each *stage*. Teachers also will know what they are expected to accomplish during the school year (Sunshine State Standards Overview 1998, 1).

Grade-level standards are more than just guides to what students should be expected to know at each level. They are a means to keep the teacher and students on course and indicators for parents. Most importantly, the standards mentioned in this section represent a renewed public commitment to make improvements in the ways students are learning to read. The Superintendent of Public Instruction in California goes one step further. She states, "Standards are our (California's) commitment to excellence." She goes on to predict:

> Fifteen years from now, we are convinced, the adoption of standards will be viewed as the single event that began "the rising tide of excellence" in our schools. No more will the critical question "What should my child be learning?" be met with uncertainty of knowledge, purpose and resolve. These [California] standards answer the question. They are comprehensive and specific. They represent our commitment to excellence (California State Board of Education 1997, inside cover).

It is worth noting at this point that setting statewide standards is not the only means for improving reading instruction and student achievement. Other things must happen as well. The California Board of Education makes four recommendations for instructional strategies to accompany state standards:

1. A strong literature, language, and comprehensive program that includes a balance of oral and written language.
2. An organized, explicit skills program that includes phonemic awareness (sounds in words), phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of the emergent reader.
3. Ongoing diagnosis that informs teaching and assessment in order to insure accountability.
4. A powerful intervention program that provides individual tutoring for children at risk of reading failure (California State Board of Education 1995, 2).

WHY STANDARDS FOR PHONICS SKILLS?

Before commenting on the value of standards for phonics instruction, a brief review of a few principles is in order. First of all, most parents and educators would agree that reading is the most important subject taught in school. Without reading skill, students would be severely handicapped in all other areas of the curriculum. Further, research indicates that the ability to sound out words successfully is a strong indicator of future growth in decoding and comprehension (Juel and Roper-Schneider 1985) and that poor phonics ability in early and later grades is correlated to poor reading ability (Chall 1967). Research also indicates that young readers benefit from explicit assistance in phonemic awareness training, and at least one-fifth of students depend on it critically (Adams 1998).

From just these bits of research it is apparent that phonics is a key component in the reading program and, as such, should have realistic standards to give it direction. Studies also show that, for the most part, parents, teachers, and the students themselves will support standards that are clear and specific (Farkas et al. 1995).

One of the big problems with reading standards, however, is that, unlike the fifty-yard dash where everyone starts at the same line, children do not come to school equally prepared. Some are far ahead of the others and some are just getting started. And the distance between the two groups generally gets larger as the years go on (Juel, Griffith, and Gough 1986). This puts the teacher in a serious dilemma. On the one hand, because of these educational disparities, she can't treat every student the same. On the other hand, she is expected to have all of them meet grade expectations often set by some outside source

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prior to the beginning of the year. So how should the teacher treat these standards? She needs to think of them more as goals or as guidelines to direct and focus her attention. She should be optimistic that most or all of her students will reach these goals, yet realistic enough to know that some students may need more time. Even failure to achieve certain standards can serve the useful purpose of indicating the areas where a student needs additional help and marking the starting point for the next teacher.

READING STANDARDS FOR ELEMENTARY GRADES

Before considering actual grade-level standards, it is important to remember that every student in every classroom is unique, not only in size and shape, but in learning ability as well. Just because a student is in first grade does not mean that he or she is learning only first-grade material. Some students may have advanced reading skills and thus should get help at a more advanced level. Other students will need additional help with readiness tasks. The teacher should be prepared to help on all levels—advanced, average, and remedial.

Phonics Standards Overview

When looking over the standards involving phonics concepts presented here, or most of the other local and statewide examples of reading standards, teachers will notice that teaching phonetic concepts, like teaching mathematical concepts, starts with the most basic ones and builds from there. Although no two examples of reading standards are exactly the same, the order of presentation is similar.

Looking at several of these standards, a teacher will generally find that in kindergarten, for example, students develop an understanding of the alphabetical principle. They begin to identify the letters and the sounds of the alphabet and learn about initial consonants.

In first grade that concept is further developed to include ending and medial sounds in words and the substitution of consonants to make new words. Some of the more common blends are added. Inflectional endings such as *-s*, *-ed*, and *-ing* are learned. The students are exposed to phonograms or word families as a way of learning words by association.

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In second grade the students build on their previous experiences and are introduced to additional blend sounds, prefixes, and suffixes. Time is spent on identification of vowel sounds and the use of vowel digraphs in words. Easier compound words and homonyms are introduced. By the end of second grade and the beginning of third grade most students begin to develop a certain fluency in reading and a degree of independence in reading as they begin to recognize more and more words by sight.

In third grade more complicated vowel digraphs, prefixes, suffixes, and inflectional endings are added to the mix. Students get practice dividing longer words into syllables and learn other structural analysis skills to decode unfamiliar words. By the end of third grade most of the key phonics skills have been presented—at least in the beginning stages—to students. Students also become more and more dependent on context clues to predict words.

In fourth grade students learn more about diphthongs and vowel digraphs. They become more involved with word meaning, synonyms, homonyms, and irregular spelling patterns. By the end of the year they can generally apply previously learned and recently acquired phonetic and structural analysis strategies to determine the meaning of words and phrases. They use the dictionary and thesaurus to derive greater meaning from words.

Although the phonetic skills have become more internalized by fifth grade, students continue to apply knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, language structure, and context to recognize words. They also use word analysis skills to construct full meaning from text as they identify and analyze the roots, prefixes, and suffixes of words. They increasingly use dictionaries, glossaries, and other sources to find the pronunciation and derivation of words.

Although the majority of phonetic principles are presented in the early grades, and explicit phonics instruction starts to taper off at the end of third grade or early in fourth grade, it is still important to continue using and developing phonics knowledge in the later grades. Not all students have mastered skills presented earlier, and a great deal more practice is necessary before students internalize them and begin to read fluently and independently. Even beyond third grade the correlation between phonics knowledge and reading achievement is positive and substantial (Chall 1967). Low reading achievement in later grades is consistently associated with poor knowledge of phonics. Knowledge of phonics is consistently associated with a high level of reading achievement (Chall 1997).

State Reading Standards

One of the primary difficulties and limitations of so many reading standards or goals is that they are often written in general terms, and therefore are subject to a great deal of individual interpretation or misinterpretation. For example, one objective or goal for the language curriculum of the state of Michigan reads as follows: "All students will use the English language effectively" (Michigan Department of Education 1995, 2). Now, what does that statement mean in terms of setting up an *effective* language curriculum, or of helping teachers set specific goals, or of telling parents what their child is expected to learn? Very little. The Colorado State Board of Education lists nine common principles to strengthen student learning. One of these principles is, "Schools should have an intellectual focus" (1995, 1). Hasn't that always been the case? Does this mean a return to classical education with a heavy emphasis on memorization and more college preparatory courses? Educators have been disagreeing for years on what kind of intellectual focus schools should provide. Such general goals or standards, while they may serve as the foundation for developing particular educational standards and as a starting point for action, are simply too general to have much meaning for a classroom teacher.

The good news is that not all states have fallen into the generalization trap. Several state boards of education, in cooperation with their teachers and reading authorities, have done a good job spelling out exactly what tasks or skills ought to introduced and/or mastered at each grade level. The *Skills-Based Scope and Sequence Guide* for Idaho teachers, for example, is quite specific. Every target skill listed in the Guide is clearly stated and easily measurable. In kindergarten, for example, it states that, among a whole host of other skills, students should be able to "clap to demonstrate ability to hear syllables in words." They should also be able to "read eight color words: red, blue, yellow, purple, green, orange, black and white." (Fox 1997, 1). The value of these kinds of specific objectives is that students' achievement of the objectives can be easily observed and evaluated.

SAMPLE READING STANDARDS

For those seeking to establish reading standards or understand more about how usable standards are constituted, the standards presented by the state of Texas can serve as a good example. These standards, like those of California, Idaho, and other states, are explicit, quite extensive, and based on recent research into learning to read. The standards for reading for Texas were se-

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lected as an example of state standards because they are realistic and easy to follow and understand. They are also in the same vein as standards proposed by other states. The Texas standards are also helpful because they include the grade level at which each concept is first presented and the continuation of that skill in other grades.

As a contrast—a complementary contrast—this chapter will also list the five phases of children's development in early reading and writing as presented by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young People (NAEYC). This presentation of reading and writing expectations describes how children at any grade level should function at a variety of phases along the reading/writing learning continuum.

Although the reading standards for Texas and the continuum are quite different in nature, they are also complementary. They both set obtainable and realistic goals for children. They also serve as professional guides both for teachers and parents to what can be expected at different grade levels or phases of learning to read and write.

It is important to point out that the standards and expectations mentioned below are illustrative, not exhaustive. They highlight the principal concerns or standards of those involved in the research and writing but should not be considered complete in any sense of the word. All teachers, especially those just entering the profession, are encouraged to obtain a copy of the standards and/or objectives of reading for their state or school district. These standards can generally be obtained by writing the state board of education. Many of them can be found on the Internet.

Texas Reading Standards for Elementary Grades

Because of the length and inclusiveness of the Texas standards and the nature of this book, only those standards that have relevance to reading and to skills related directly to phonemic awareness and structural analysis of words are included below. Many reading standards such as those listed under "Listening Skills," "Comprehension," and "Language Arts Skills" were excluded, not because they are not considered important, but because they didn't fall within the purview of this book. Excluded also were statewide standards for Spanish-speaking youngsters and others whose primary language is not English. Readers are encouraged to write to the Texas Board of Education for the complete text.

Kindergarten Standards

Kindergarten students engage in many activities that help develop their oral language skills and help them to begin to read and write.

Reading/Print Awareness

The student is expected to

1. Recognize that print represents spoken language and conveys meaning such as his/her own name and signs such as *Exit* and *Danger.* (K–1)
2. Know that print moves left-to-right across the page and top to bottom. (K–1)
3. Understand that written words are separated by space. (K–1)
4. Know the difference between individual letters and printed words. (K–1)
5. Know the difference between capital and lowercase letters. (K–1)
6. Recognize how readers use capitalization and punctuation to comprehend. (K–1)
7. Understand that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters. (K–1)
8. Recognize that different parts of a book such as cover, title page, and table of contents offer information. (K–1)

Reading/Phonological Awareness

The student is expected to

1. Demonstrate the concept of a word by dividing spoken sentences into individual words. (K–1)
2. Identify, segment, and combine syllables within spoken words such as by clapping syllables and moving manipulatives to represent syllables in words. (K–1)
3. Produce rhyming words and distinguish rhyming words from non-rhyming words. (K–1)
4. Identify and isolate the initial and final sounds of a spoken word. (K–1)
5. Blend sounds to make spoken words such as moving manipulatives to blend phonemes in a spoken word. (K–1)
6. Segment one-syllable spoken words into individual phonemes, clearly producing beginning, medial, and final sounds. (K–1)

Reading/Letter-Sound Relationships

The student is expected to

1. Name and identify each letter of the alphabet. (K–1)
2. Understand that written words are composed of letters that represent sounds. (K–1)
3. Learn and apply letter-sound correspondences of a set of consonants and vowels to begin to read. (K–1)

First Grade Standards

In grade 1, students continue to develop their oral language and communication skills and move to becoming independent readers and writers. Students learn most of the common letter-sound correspondences and use this knowledge to decode written words.

Reading/Print Awareness

The student is expected to

1. Recognize that print represents spoken language and conveys meaning such as his/her own name and signs such as *Exit* and *Danger.* (K–1)
2. Know that print moves left-to-right across the page and top to bottom. (K–1)
3. Understand that written words are separated by spaces. (K–1)
4. Know the difference between individual letters and printed words. (K–1)
5. Know the order of the alphabet. (K–1)
6. Know the difference between capital and lowercase letters. (K–1)
7. Recognize how readers use capitalization and punctuation to comprehend. (K–1)
8. Understand that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters. (K–1)
9. Recognize that different parts of a book such as cover, title page, and table of contents offer information. (K–1)
10. Recognize that there are correct spellings for words. (1)
11. Recognize the distinguishing features of a paragraph. (1)

Reading/Phonological Awareness

The student is expected to

1. Demonstrate the concept of what a word is by dividing spoken sentences into individual words. (K–1)
2. Identify, segment and combine syllables within spoken words such as by clapping syllables and moving manipulatives to represent syllables in words. (K–1)
3. Produce rhyming words and distinguish rhyming words from non-rhyming words. (K–1)
4. Identify and isolate the initial and final sound of a spoken word. (K–1)
5. Blend sounds to make spoken words, including three and four phoneme words, through ways such as moving manipulatives to blend phonemes in a spoken word. (1)
6. Segment one-syllable spoken words into individual phonemes, including three and four phoneme words, clearly producing beginning, medial, and final sounds. (K–1)

Reading/Letter-Sound Relationships

The student is expected to

1. Name and identify each letter of the alphabet. (K–1)
2. Understand that written words are composed of letters that represent sounds. (K–1)
3. Learn and apply letter-sound correspondences of a set of consonants and vowels to begin to read. (K–1)
4. Learn and apply the most common letter-sound correspondences, including the sounds represented by single letters (consonants and vowels); consonant blends such as *bl, st, tr;* consonant digraphs such as *th, sh, ck;* and vowel digraphs and diphthongs such as *ea, ie, ee.* (1)
5. Blend initial letter-sounds with common vowel spelling patterns to read words. (1–3)
6. Decode by using letter-sound correspondences within regularly spelled words. (1–3)
7. Use letter-sound knowledge to read decodable texts (engaging and coherent texts in which most of the words are comprised of an accumulating sequence of letter-sound correspondences being taught). (1)

Reading/Word Identification

The student is expected to

1. Decode by using all letter-sound correspondences within a word. (1–3)
2. Use common spelling patterns to read words. (1)
3. Use structural cues to recognize words such as compounds, base words, and inflections such as *-s, -es, -ed, -ing.* (1–2)
4. Identify multisyllabic words by using common syllable patterns. (1–3)
5. Recognize high frequency irregular words such as *said, was, where,* and *is.* (1–2)
6. Use knowledge of word order (syntax) and context to support word identification and confirm word meaning. (1–3)
7. Read both regular and irregular words automatically such as through multiple opportunities to read and reread. (1–3)

Writing/Spelling

The student is expected to

1. Write his/her own name and other important words. (K–1)
2. Write each letter of the alphabet, both capital and lowercase, using correct formation, appropriate size, and spacing. (1)
3. Use phonological knowledge to map sounds to letters and write messages. (K–1)
4. Write with more proficient spelling of regularly spelled patterns such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC)—*cat, hot, but,* consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e (CVCe)—*hope, game, mice,* and one-syllable words with blends—*drop, slip, when.* (1–3)
5. Write with more proficient spelling of inflectional endings such as plurals and verb tenses. (1–2)
6. Spell single syllable words that have r-controlled vowels such as *burn* or *star;* that have final consonants *l, f,* and *s* such as in *miss* or *doll;* and that have *ck* as the final consonant such as *buck.* (1)
7. Use resources to find correct spelling, synonyms, and replacement words. (1–3)
8. Use conventional spelling of familiar words in final draft. (1)

Second Grade Standards

In Grade 2, students read and write independently. Second grade students recognize a large number of words automatically, and use a variety of word identification strategies to figure out words they do not immediately recognize.

Reading/Word Identification

The student is expected to

1. Decode by using all letter-sound correspondences within a word. (1–3)
2. Blend initial letter-sound with common vowel spelling patterns to read words. (1–3)
3. Recognize high frequency irregular words such as: *said, was, where,* and *is.* (1–2)
4. Identify mulitisyllabic words by using common syllable patterns. (1–3)
5. Use structural cues to recognize words such as compounds, base words, and inflections such as *-s, -es, -ed,* and *-ing.* (1–2)
6. Use structural cues such as prefixes and suffixes to recognize words, for example, *un-* and *-ly.* (2)
7. Use knowledge of word order (syntax) and content to support word identification and confirm word meaning. (1–3)
8. Read both regular and irregular words automatically such as through multiple opportunities to read and reread. (1–3)

Writing/Spelling

The student is expected to

1. Use resources to find correct spelling, synonyms, and replacement words. (1–3)
2. Write with more proficient spelling of regularly spelled patterns such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC)—*cat, hot, but,* consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e (CVCe)—*hope, gone, mice* and one syllable words with blends—*drop, slip, when.* (1–3)
3. Write with more proficient spelling of inflectional endings, including plurals and verb tenses. (1–2)
4. Write with more proficient use of orthographic patterns and rules such as: keep/cap, sack/book, out/cow, consonant doubling, dropping e and changing y to i. (2)

Third Grade Standards

In Grade 3, students read and write more independently than in any previous grade and spend significant blocks of time engaged in reading and writing on their own as well as assigned tasks and projects.

Reading/Word Identification

The student is expected to

1. Decode by using all letter-sound correspondences within a word. (1–3)
2. Blend initial letter-sounds with common vowel spelling patterns to read words. (1–3)
3. Identify multisyllabic words by using common syllable patterns. (1–3)
4. Use root words and other structural cues such as prefixes and suffixes and derivational endings to recognize words. (3)
5. Use knowledge of word order (syntax) and context to support word identification and confirm word meaning. (1–3)
6. Read both regular and irregular words automatically such as through multiple opportunities to read and reread. (1–3)

Writing/Spelling

The student is expected to

1. Write with more proficient spelling of regularly spelled patterns such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC)—cat, hot, but, consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e—hope, game, mice, and one syllable words with blends—drop, slip, when. (1–3)
2. Spell mutisyllabic words using regularly spelled phonogram patterns. (3)
3. Write with more proficient spelling of inflectional endings, including plurals and past tense and words that drop the final e when such endings as -ed, -ing, or -able are added. (3)
4. Write with more proficient use of orthographic patterns and rules such as oil/toy, match/speech, badge/cage, consonant doubling, dropping e and changing y to i. (3)
5. Write with more proficient spelling of contractions, compounds and homonyms such as hair/hare, bear/bare. (3)
6. Write with accurate spelling of syllable constructions such as closed, open, consonants before -le and syllable boundary patterns. (3–6)

7. Spell words ending in -tion and -sion such as station and procession. (3)
8. Use resources to find correct spelling, synonyms or replacement words. (1–3)

Fourth Grade Standards

In Grade 4, students spend significant blocks of time engaged in reading and writing independently. Fourth grade students read with a growing interest in a wide variety of topics and adjust their reading approach to various forms of texts.

Reading/Word Identification

The student is expected to

1. Apply knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, language structure, and context to recognize words. (4–8)
2. Use structural analysis to identify root words with prefixes such as dis-, non-, in-, and suffixes such as -ness, -tion, and -able. (4–6)
3. Locate the meanings, pronunciations, and derivations of unfamiliar words using dictionaries, glossaries, and other sources. (4–8)

Writing/Spelling

The student is expected to

1. Write with accurate spelling of syllable constructions including closed, open, consonant before -le and syllable boundary patterns. (3–6)
2. Write with accurate spelling of roots such as drink, speak, read, or happy, inflections such as those that change tense or number suffixes such as -able or -less and prefixes such as re- and un-. (4–6)
3. Use regular and irregular plurals correctly. (4–6)
4. Use adjectives (comparative and superlative forms) and adverbs appropriately to make writing vivid and precise. (4–6)

Fifth Grade Standards

In Grade 5, students refine and master previous learned knowledge skills in increasingly complex presentations, reading selections and written composition. Children read from classic and contemporary selections and informational texts.

Reading/Word Identification

The student is expected to

1. Apply knowledge of letter sound correspondences, language structure, and context to recognize words. (4–8)
2. Use structural analysis to identify root words with prefixes such as dis-, non-, and in-; and suffixes such as -ness, -tion, and -able. (4–6)
3. Locate the meanings, pronunciations and derivation of unfamiliar words using dictionaries, glossaries, and other sources. (4–6)
4. Determine meanings of derivatives by applying knowledge of the meaning of root words such as like, pay, or happy, and affixes such as dis-, pre-, and un-. (4–8)
5. Use adjectives (comparative and superlative forms) and adverbs appropriately to make writing vivid or precise. (4–6)

The Continuum Approach

The Continuum (continuous phases) of Children's Development in Early Reading and Writing was developed as a result of the thinking of teacher trainers, researchers, policy makers, classroom teachers, parents, and consultants from the U.S. Department of Education. One of the important aspects of the Continuum is that it points out clearly that learning to read and write involves the participation of parents and family members as well as that of child and teacher. Following are the key points for each of the five phases as outlined in a joint position statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (adopted 1998).

Continuum of Children's Development in Early Reading and Writing

Phase 1: Awareness and exploration (goals for preschool)

Children explore their environment and build the foundations for learning to read and write.

Children can

- Enjoy listening to and discussing storybooks
- Understand that print carries a message
- Engage in reading and writing attempts
- Identify labels and signs in their environment

- Participate in rhyming games
- Identify some letters and make some letter-sound matches
- Use known letters or approximations of letters to represent written language (especially meaningful words like their name and phrases such as "I love you")

What teachers do

- Share books with children, including Big Books, and model reading behaviors
- Talk about letters by name and sound
- Establish a literacy-rich environment
- Reread favorite stories
- Engage children in language games
- Promote literacy-related play activities
- Encourage children to experiment with writing

What parents and family can do

- Talk with children, engage them in conversation, give names of things, show interest in what child says
- Read and reread stories with predictable text to children
- Encourage children to recount experiences and describe ideas and events that are important to them
- Visit the library regularly
- Provide opportunities for the child to draw and print, using markers, crayons, and pencils

Phase 2: Experimental reading and writing (goals for kindergarten)

Children develop basic concepts of print and begin to engage in and experiment with reading and writing.

Kindergartners can

- Enjoy being read to and themselves retell simple narrative stories or informational texts
- Use descriptive language to explain and explore
- Recognize letters and letter-sound matches
- Show familiarity with rhyming and beginning sounds

- Understand left-to-right and top-to-bottom orientation and familiar concepts in print
- Match spoken words with written ones
- Begin to write letters of the alphabet and some high frequency words

What teachers do

- Encourage children to talk about reading and writing experiences
- Provide many opportunities for children to explore and identify sound-symbol relationships in meaningful context
- Help children to segment spoken words into individual sounds and blend sounds into whole words (for example, by slowly writing a word and saying its sound)
- Frequently read interesting and conceptually rich stories to children
- Provide daily opportunities for children to write
- Help children to build a sight vocabulary
- Create a literacy-rich environment for children to engage independently in reading and writing

What parents and family members can do

- Daily read and reread narrative and informational stories to children
- Encourage children's attempts at reading and writing
- Allow children to participate in activities that involve writing and reading (for example, cooking, making grocery lists)
- Play games that involve specific directions (such as "Simon Says")
- Have conversation with children during mealtimes and throughout the day

Phase 3: Early reading and writing (goals for first grade)

Children begin to read simple stories and can write on a topic that is meaningful to them.

First graders can

- Read and retell familiar stories
- Use strategies (rereading, predicting, questioning, contextualizing) when comprehension breaks down
- Orally read with reasonable fluency

- Use letter-sound associations, word parts, and context to identify new words
- Identify an increasing number of words by sight
- Sound out and represent all substantial sounds in spelling a word
- Write about topics that are personally meaningful
- Attempt to use some punctuation and capitalization

What teachers do

- Support the development of vocabulary by reading daily to the children, transcribing their language, and selecting materials that expand children's knowledge and language development
- Model strategies and provide practice for identifying unknown words
- Give children opportunities for independent reading and writing practice
- Read, write, and discuss a range of different text types (poems, informational books)
- Introduce new words and teach strategies for learning to spell new words
- Demonstrate and model strategies to use when comprehension breaks down
- Help children build lists of commonly used words from their writing

What parents and family members can do

- Talk about favorite storybooks
- Read to children and encourage them to read to you
- Suggest that children write to friends and relatives
- Bring to a parent-teacher conference evidence of what your child can do in writing and reading
- Encourage children to share what they have learned about writing and reading

Phase 4: Transitional reading and writing (goals for second grade)

Children begin to read more fluently and write various text forms using simple and more complex sentences.

Second graders can

- Read with greater fluency
- Use strategies more efficiently (rereading, questioning, and so on) when comprehension breaks down
- Use word identification strategies with greater facility to unlock unknown words
- Identify an increasing number of words by sight
- Write about a range of topics to suit different audiences
- Use common letter patterns and critical features to spell words
- Punctuate simple sentences correctly and proofread their own work
- Spend time reading daily and use reading to research topic

What teachers do

- Create a climate that fosters analytic, evaluative, and reflective thinking
- Teach children to write in multiple forms (stories, information, poems)
- Ensure that children read a range of texts for a variety of purposes
- Teach revising, editing, and proofreading skills
- Teach strategies for spelling new and difficult words
- Model enjoyment of reading

What parents and family members can do

- Continue to read to children and encourage them to read to you
- Engage children in activities that require reading and writing
- Become involved in school activities
- Show children your interest in their learning by displaying their written work
- Visit a library regularly
- Support your child's specific hobby or interest with reading material and references

Phase 5: Independent and productive reading and writing (goals for third grade)

Children continue to extend and refine their reading and writing to suit varying purposes and audiences.

Third graders can

- Read fluently and enjoy reading
- Use a range of strategies when drawing meaning from the text
- Use word identification strategies appropriately and automatically when encountering unknown words
- Recognize and discuss elements of different text structures
- Make critical connections between texts
- Write expressively in many different forms (stories, poems, reports)
- Use a rich variety of vocabulary and sentences appropriate to text forms
- Revise and edit their own writing during and after composing
- Spell words correctly in final spelling drafts

What teachers do

- Provide opportunities daily for children to read, examine, and critically evaluate narrative and expository texts
- Continue to create a climate that fosters critical reading and personal response
- Teach children to examine ideas in context
- Encourage children to use writing as a tool for thinking and learning
- Extend children's knowledge of the correct use of writing conventions
- Emphasize the importance of correct spelling in finished written projects
- Create a climate that engages all children as a community of literate learners

What parents and family members can do

- Continue to support children's learning and interests by visiting the library and bookstores with them
- Find ways to highlight children's progress in reading and writing
- Stay in regular contact with your child's teachers about activities and progress in reading and writing

- Encourage children to use and enjoy print for many purposes (such as recipes, directions, games, and sports)
- Build a love of language in all its forms and engage children in conversation

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A joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), adopted 1998. Reprinted with permission of the IRA and NAEYC.

CONCLUSION

It is remarkable how the demand for educational accountability and more educational standards has evolved in the last decade or so. In 1990 very few states worked at setting educational standards. By 1996, however, according to a review by the American Federation of Teachers, 48 states had already passed, or were in the process of developing, academic standards (Gandal 1996). At about the same time more and more teachers, parents, administrators, and professional organizations were asking for clearer and more research-based guidelines with which to frame educational objectives (Kendall and Marzano 1997). Specifically, teachers and parents want to know what is expected at each grade level.

Integrating phonics topics into the reading standards helps ensure that students receive systematic, explicit phonics instruction as part of their reading program. Clear, specific reading standards that include phonics help parents and teachers answer questions such as: How do phonics skills build on each other? How can they best be taught and how can we evaluate them? What kind of intervention program do we need and how early should it start? What do we do when children don't meet these standards? Like the other reading instruction approaches with which it should be integrated, phonics requires goals or standards to give it meaning and direction. Setting phonics standards also serves to clarify the subject, provide a set of expectations, and elevate expectations (Kendall and Marzano 1997).

While well-crafted state and national standards are a great potential help to all teachers and parents, let us remember that good teachers have always had high standards both for themselves and the students they teach. Standards, whether state mandated or self-imposed, have always been a critical part of an effective reading program in the past and will continue to be in the years to come.

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Chapter 8

Informal Reading Tests

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Evaluation of students' progress in reading is an ongoing process. Teachers can learn a great deal about individuals' strong points and weak points by simply listening as each student reads and making notes of the types of mistakes the student makes—noting whether these are mostly substitution mistakes or mistakes resulting from poor phonics skills. Teachers also rely heavily on the unit tests, which are generally given at the completion of a block of material, and standardized tests, which are generally administered at the end of the school year to asses progress or lack thereof in reading.

While these unit and standardized tests can be meaningful and helpful in diagnosing areas of strength and weakness, they have their limitations. Standardized tests are generally administered one or two times a year, usually at the end of a semester or year. Standardized tests tend to be more national in scope and have the propensity to place children into categories—average, above average, below average. Standardized tests do a better job of indicating "where children stand in relationship to their classmates, to other students in the district, and to students across the country" (Burns 1999, 267). These tests may not reflect what has been taught in the classroom. Teachers more and more are moving away from reliance on standardized and commercially produced tests and are making more use of informal classroom assessment (Strickland 1998).

ABOUT THE TESTS

Informal or teacher-made tests, such as those presented in this chapter, are more clearly directed at material recently taught—the alphabet, consonants, syllabication, etc. They are meant to measure the progress of one group or one student and have validity only for that group. These tests are usually given just after, or shortly after, the teacher has presented material or spent time on a particular aspect of reading. She makes up her own test and administers it to an individual or group of students. In correcting the tests she receives immediate feedback on students' skill levels and can plan upcoming lessons accordingly. Informal tests are generally short and to the point and meant for diagnostic purposes only. They are handy things to show parents at parent-teacher conferences to illustrate a given student's level of mastery or particular needs.

The tests in this chapter are illustrative of the types of informal tests teachers construct and use when assessing phonics progress. These tests are not exhaustive. Teachers might choose to use some of the tests as is or treat them as

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examples in creating their own informal tests. Most of the tests are very broad and could be administered at different grade levels. They are the kind of assessment teachers might use after students have taken a series of smaller tests. For example, a first-grade teacher could use parts of the test on consonants, but unless her students are quite advanced, she should not expect them to do well on the entire test. A third-grade teacher, on the other hand, could administer the test to the entire class and expect most of them to do well. An upper elementary teacher might use some of the tests presented here to get a better idea of what a student, or group of students, still needs in the way of phonics instruction.

The tests in this chapter are not intended for grade marks (A, B, D)—unit tests or standardized tests are better suited for that purpose. The tests presented here are meant to be indicators of what a student knows in a specific area and should be used for the continuous assessment needed in all reading programs.

Administering the Tests

Even though these are informal tests, it is very important that the teacher explain to the student or group why the test is being administered, why it is important that they try their best, and how much time is allotted for the test. The students should be allowed to ask any questions before the test begins. During the test the teacher should not give any help or instructions, other than procedural clarifications. The teacher should instruct the students not to spend too much time on one answer. Tell the students to go on to the next item and come back to the items they did not answer on the first pass.

Scoring the Tests

These tests are not scored with a letter grade; they are indicators of whether a student has mastered a particular skill or not. A perfect or near-perfect score means mastery at least at the time of the test. Any student who misses more than 25 percent of the items obviously needs additional practice and review. Teachers should keep records of how students do on the tests for future reference. Keeping track of individual students' progress in phonics topics is important, since lack of knowledge in one or more of these areas is a good indicator of present and future problems.

Comments on Individual Tests

Below are comments on each test in this chapter. They provide information such as the grade levels for which the test is appropriate and notes on administering the test. It is recommended that teachers read the comments before deciding whether to give a test to their students.

The Manuscript Alphabet (K–2)

[Figure 8.1] The test for the manuscript alphabet should be given to students in kindergarten through second grade. All letters, both uppercase and lowercase, should be written in exact alphabetical order. The time limit should not exceed ten minutes.

The Cursive Alphabet (Grade 3 and Above)

[Figure 8.2] All students in third grade or above should be able to write all the letters of the alphabet in upper- and lowercase in both manuscript and cursive handwriting in exact alphabetical order. For third graders and upper elementary students it is important that both alphabets be presented together in order to make sure students know both forms and are not substituting manuscript letters for cursive letters and vice versa.

Foundation Words I (Grade 2 and Above)

[Figure 8.3] This test asks students to distinguish words from nonwords and requires a certain degree of both word recognition and decoding skills. The words that are correctly spelled are all within the listening and reading vocabularies of elementary students and are generally found in the reading material of this age group. Teachers may want to substitute words students have recently studied for those in this test.

Foundation Words II (Grade 3 and Above)

[Figure 8.4] This test is similar to the previous one except that the words represent a slightly greater degree of difficulty. This test can be modified to include words recently studied in reading class. Unmodified, it may be given to students in the third grade or above to get an indication of their word recognition skills.

Beginning and Ending Consonants (Grades 1 and 2)

[Figures 8.5 & 8.6] The test on initial consonant sounds is appropriate for students at the end of first grade who have had a lot of practice with beginning sounds. The ending sounds could be saved for the middle of second grade. It is important that the teacher pronounce each word clearly with emphasis on the beginning sounds for the first test and on the ending sounds

for the second. She should repeat the clue word twice and not go back to repeat words later on. **Beginning Sounds answers:** 1. game 2. kick 3. so 4. pan 5. quack 6. love 7. fish 8. hat 9. zip 10. keep 11. jet 12. vase 13. gem 14. mice 15. yell 16. paint 17. will 18. ride 19. boat 20. camp. **Ending Sounds answers:** 1. luck 2. whiz 3. corn 4. mob 5. six 6. fail 7. bug 8. love 9. try 10. ham 11. jar 12. golf 13. cut 14. jeep 15. bad 16. dress 17. her 18. picnic 19. word 20. which.

Common Endings (Grade 2 and Above)

[Figure 8.7] This test is quite long and inclusive. It tests knowledge of some of the most important ending sounds, or phonograms, students are likely to encounter in early reading material. This test is appropriate only if students have had sufficient prior experience with phonograms. The teacher may want to break this test into a series of shorter ones. This is also a good test for identification of initial consonants.

Contractions (Grade 4 and Above)

[Figure 8.8] Although students meet contractions early on in reading, the test below presupposes that students have been exposed in some way to all the contractions and that they have had practice writing them. For this reason it is better to postpone this comprehensive type of test until fourth grade or later. This test also makes a good review for students in the junior high or middle school grades who often confuse certain forms.

Initial Consonant Blends and Digraphs (Grade 3 and Above)

[Figure 8.9] This test represents a more comprehensive type, including 37 double and triple blends and digraphs. Before students are exposed to this test they should have had less inclusive informal testing at earlier grade levels. This test could be very useful for teachers in the upper grades who have students with serious reading problems.

Forming Plurals (Grade 4 and Above)

[Figure 8.10] Students become exposed to plural endings at a very early stage of reading. In the first few grades it is necessary to explain what a plural is and how to form them as they come up in reading. The test in this chapter is rather comprehensive and involves a great many spelling changes and ideas that are not presented until the fourth and fifth grades and beyond. Many older students and even adults might have difficulty with some of the items on this test.

Vowel Sounds (Grade 2 and Above)

[Figure 8.11] Sections of this test, especially words with short vowels, can be handled by most second graders. Some of the vowel digraphs that represent long vowel sounds may be difficult for third graders. Continuous testing of vowel sounds is necessary not only because vowels are such a challenging aspect of learning to read but because success in unit and standardized tests is often contingent on the student's knowledge of vowel sounds.

Dividing Words into Syllables (Grade 3 and Above)

[Figure 8.12] In this particular test it is not all that important that the students divide every word correctly as long as they keep the vowel sounds apart and take off prefixes and suffixes. For example, dividing *woman* as *wo-man* or *level* as *le-vel* would be acceptable. On the other hand, such spellings as *goo-dness* would not be acceptable since the student in this case obviously does not know how to pronounce the word. Some teacher judgment is necessary in correcting this test.

Prefixes and Suffixes (Grade 3 and Above)

[Figures 8.13a & 8.13b] Although most phonics lessons are completed by the end of third grade or early in fourth grade, prefixes, suffixes, and root words are taught extensively from third grade on. In later elementary grades, junior high, and high school teachers take time to further develop knowledge of root words and affixes. The prefixes and suffixes in this test should be easily identifiable by most third and fourth graders.

Word Checklists (Grades 1 and Above)

[Figures 8.14a–8.14c; 8.15a–8.15c; 8:16a–8.16c] Each Word Checklist test consists of 200 words selected from reading lists and student classroom texts. Word Checklist I is for first and second graders. The words in this test were randomly selected from various reading lists and books students use in beginning reading classes. By the end of first grade or the beginning of second grade students should be able to recognize these words with little hesitation. Word Checklist II is for grade two and above. The words in this test were randomly selected from material second and third graders often encounter in the process of developing reading skills. The words should be easily recognizable by average and above average students at this level. Students having reading problems in the upper elementary grades might also profit from going through this list. Word Checklist III is for grade four and above. The words are a random selection of important concept words that often appear in science, math-

ematics, and geography textbooks and materials used in the later elementary grades. Both pronunciation and understanding of these words are important. Note that the polysyllabic words in these checklists can also be used to test students' skills in dividing words into syllables.

Administering the Word Checklist Tests: This is a one-on-one test. Do one column at a time. Ask the student to read each word on the list. If the student is hesitant, ask him or her to try to sound out the word. If the student is not able to say the word, he or she should go on to the next word. On your copy of the test, put a check on the line next to the missed word. Record the number of misses at the bottom of the column. After the student has finished the list the teacher may try to help the student figure out why certain words were missed and give a few clues to help the student the next time he or she encounters those words. If the student has a perfect or near-perfect score, go on to the next column. Do not attempt to complete all the columns in one sitting unless the student is willing and able. The next time you go over the list with the student, begin with the missed words first and proceed from there.

The Manuscript Alphabet

Name____________________________ Date________________

Directions: Write all the missing letters of the alphabet in proper alphabetical order. You must include both capital and small letters.

Aa		Cc			Ff
	Hh				Ll
		Oo			
	Tt		Vv		
	Zz				

Figure 8.1

The Cursive Alphabet

Name______________________ Date______________

Directions: Write all the missing letters of the alphabet in proper alphabetical order. You must include both capital and small letters.

______ ______ Cc ______ ______ ______

Gg ______ ______ ______ Kk ______

______ ______ Oo ______ ______ ______

Ss ______ ______ Vv ______ ______

______ ______

Figure 8.2

Foundation Words I

Name________________________ Date______________

Directions: Circle two words in each line that are not really words.

1.	clean	funy	play	with	cume	do
2.	dish	four	fathur	left	sume	too
3.	box	aet	kind	rhuse	sat	house
4.	skool	olde	let	jump	over	three
5.	time	wish	toye	tuke	zoo	blew
6.	shall	agin	wuz	them	seven	five
7.	boke	babby	food	girl	now	new
8.	onlly	off	seid	party	it's	how
9.	live	morning	late	grean	great	ouce
10.	saw	ferst	thin	first	whair	here
11.	do	lind	around	next	tall	wer
12.	good	without	who	stope	you	peeple

Figure 8.3

Foundation Words II

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Circle two words in each line that are not really words.

1. cowboy beginning curcus child wate either
2. voise table streat state store seed
3. buy corn beet creem treat peece
4. caben below water pitchur sunny prize
5. cried knew budd chen teeth truth
6. stor ground reach rake report retern
7. smell smill smull small smile smells
8. sity block being rabit child children
9. ring rang rung rong ringe wrote
10. womin piece window won weer wore
11. hemself plant rain enside animal bear
12. eight right sister pleeze brow puch

Figure 8.4

Beginning Consonants

Name________________________ Date______________

Directions: Listen carefully as your teacher pronounces each word. Pay particular attention to the beginning sound of each word and write the letter or letters that represent the sound in the space to complete the word.

1. ___ame
2. ___ick
3. ___o
4. ___an
5. ___ack
6. ___ove
7. ___ish
8. ___at
9. ___ip
10. ___eep
11. ___et
12. ___ase
13. ___em
14. ___ice
15. ___ell
16. ___aint
17. ___ill
18. ___ide
19. ___oat
20. ___amp

Figure 8.5

Ending Consonants

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Listen carefully as your teacher pronounces each word. Pay particular attention to the sound you hear at the end of each word and write the letter that represents that sound in the space to complete the word.

1. luc___
2. whi___
3. cor___
4. mo___
5. si___
6. fai___
7. bu___
8. lo___e
9. tr___
10. ha___
11. ja___
12. gol___
13. cu___
14. jee___
15. ba___
16. dres___
17. he___
18. picni___
19. wor___
20. whic___

Figure 8.6

Common Endings

Name________________________________ Date____________________

Directions: Write a consonant letter in the space in front of the sounds below to make a word.

1. ____at
2. ____ut
3. ____ill
4. ____ent
5. ____ap
6. ____ew
7. ____ot
8. ____it
9. ____ay
10. ____ow
11. ____ip
12. ____eat
13. ____od
14. ____in
15. ____ell
16. ____ug
17. ____ace
18. ____ess
19. ____all
20. ____ing
21. ____eed
22. ____ang
23. ____uck
24. ____ad
25. ____ight
26. ____ane
27. ____ink
28. ____ear
29. ____one
30. ____end
31. ____ine
32. ____est
33. ____ock
34. ____ar
35. ____op
36. ____ipe
37. ____ite
38. ____ump

Figure 8.7

Contractions

Name ______________________ Date ______________

Directions: Write the correct contraction next to the two words.

1. are not ______________
2. could not ______________
3. does not ______________
4. had not ______________
5. have not ______________
6. should not ______________
7. were not ______________
8. would not ______________
9. you are ______________
10. they are ______________
11. I will ______________
12. she will ______________
13. you will ______________
14. it will ______________
15. I have ______________
16. you have ______________
17. he has ______________
18. that is ______________

Directions: Write two words that have the same meaning as the contractions.

1. can't ______________
2. didn't ______________
3. doesn't ______________
4. hasn't ______________
5. isn't ______________
6. we'll ______________
7. they'll ______________
8. that'll ______________
9. we've ______________
10. they've ______________
11. wasn't ______________
12. won't ______________
13. we're ______________
14. they're ______________
15. he'll ______________
16. she's ______________
17. it's ______________
18. there's ______________

Figure 8.8

Initial Consonant Blends and Digraphs

Name________________________________ Date__________________

Directions: Choose an ending that goes with the blend sound to make a word. Draw a circle around that ending. The first one is done for you.

1. bl -ace, [✓ -ow,] -urch, -ooth
2. cl -ild, -oo, -imb, -ow
3. br -imp, -ace, -urch, -ooth
4. ch -itch, -ild, -oop, -imb
5. sm -ice, -inch, -ink, -art
6. th -ile, -ale, -in, -arp
7. sw -ink, -aw, -ice, -ell
8. st -um, -art, -ap, -uce
9. pl -oop, -ar, -irp, -um
10. wh -ile, -ep, -atch, ope
11. sk -unk, -ink, -enk, -onk
12. fl -ass, -ive, -ag, -ig
13. cr -oom, -iff, -ong, -ime
14. sh -iff, -ench, -ow, -oop
15. pr -unt, -ench, -ong, -oom
16. sn -ow, -im, -ing, -irt
17. sk -y, -ick, -urch, -ow
18. gl -ive, -ave, -ide, -uve
19. sl -ench, -urch, -ice, -uce
20. sp -inch, -ench, -urch, -ine
21. tr -ock, -ibe, -ung, -ong
22. sc -ope, -ipe, -ump, -ime
23. th -im, -ip, -ope, -ink
24. tr -est, -ack, -er, -ost
25. fr -im, -est, -ime, -esh
26. gr -ip, -ooth, -ine, -ild
27. sw -ink, -eat, -ire, -ime
28. ch -im, -ope, -ime, -urt
29. tw -ime, -eet, -ore, -ure
30. scr -ap, -oat, -ash, -aye
31. str -irt, -urt, -art, -ay
32. spr -ipe, -ape, -ing, -ide
33. thr -ang, -ill, -uze, -ise
34. shr -use, -ide, -uce, -ed
35. spl -ish, -ash, -ush, -ide
36. spr -oate, -uss, -ay, -illy
37. squ -uce, -ide, -ate, -are

Figure 8.9

Forming Plurals

Name ______________________ Date ______________

Directions: Change the singular nouns into plurals.

1. self ______________
2. box ______________
3. wife ______________
4. berry ______________
5. potato ______________
6. radio ______________
7. cracker ______________
8. sheet ______________
9. deer ______________
10. life ______________
11. forty ______________
12. tax ______________
13. ox ______________
14. city ______________
15. woman ______________
16. sky ______________
17. echo ______________
18. dog ______________
19. man ______________
20. wolf ______________
21. loss ______________
22. church ______________
23. sheep ______________
24. money ______________
25. pot ______________
26. alumnus ______________
27. hat ______________
28. table ______________
29. loaf ______________
30. zero ______________

Figure 8.10

Vowel Sounds

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Underline all words with a long vowel sound. Circle all words with a short vowel sound.

1. got
2. time
3. see
4. not
5. go
6. lay
7. bat
8. when
9. look
10. lump
11. dog
12. mud
13. sent
14. blew
15. use
16. pot
17. eat
18. list
19. grade
20. by

Directions: Add a vowel (a, e, i, o, u, y) to make a word.

1. d___
2. nev__r
3. littl__
4. h__ke
5. __pen
6. b__at
7. h__pe
8. he__r
9. sev__n
10. f__me
11. st__te
12. lo__k
13. __s
14. fl__g
15. fac__
16. k__nd
17. __nder
18. w__rk
19. m__n
20. j__mp

Figure 8.11

Dividing Words into Syllables

Name ______________________ Date ______________

Directions: Divide the words into syllables.

1. letter ____________
2. woman ____________
3. cowboy ____________
4. level ____________
5. tulip ____________
6. butterfly ____________
7. pony ____________
8. every ____________
9. mistake ____________
10. cabin ____________
11. Internet ____________
12. gentle ____________
13. never ____________
14. crazy ____________
15. basket ____________
16. runner ____________
17. motor ____________
18. poodle ____________
19. color ____________
20. afternoon ____________
21. thanksgiving ____________
22. goodness ____________
23. understanding ____________
24. forgetful ____________
25. reward ____________
26. locality ____________
27. teacher ____________
28. exactly ____________
29. English ____________
30. rumble ____________

Figure 8.12

Prefixes and Suffixes

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Circle the ending that goes with the prefix to make a new word. The first one is done for you.

1. pro -spell, [✓ -noun,] -tall, -meter
2. ex -port, -stub, -part, -do
3. mis -add, -lace, -gone, -place
4. ad -spent, -mit, -angle, -fort
5. con -sence, -cycle, -sent, -arm
6. re -heat, -hot, -hut, -hurm
7. dis -stop, -arm, -stair, -ploy
8. fore -mission, -tion, -arm, -dew
9. non -stop, -tion, -shun, -mitty
10. pre -any, -brang, -blue, -pay
11. super -dex, -mit, -star, -min
12. post -star, -store, -ion, -war
13. co -stip, -strange, -stand, -star
14. anti -freeze, -gone, -loppe, -stair
15. per -handel, -form, -do, -hops
16. sub -zip, -long, -tract, -lop
17. un -load, -fere, -meter, -err
18. mid -going, -gone, -day, -fitting
19. bi -house, -dun, -cycle, -van
20. de -joy, -fax, -flirt, -part
21. im -sect, -cid, -polite, -pock
22. per -mit, -ferm, -fort, -ture
23. inter -polite, -foll, -fere, -site
24. in -fire, -side, -hold, -pit
25. trans -motion, -part, -joy, -mit
26. bi -sect, -sycle, -build, -felt
27. centi -ury, -meters, -gone, -pix
28. tri -ally, -angle, -angel, -fully
29. dia -happy, -meter, -ppurs, -locks
30. over -chur, -do, -ploy, -side

Figure 8.13a

Prefixes and Suffixes

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Add one of the following endings *(-ed, -ing, -ful, -ly, -ive, -y, -ment, -en, -less, -ness, -tion, -sion)* to the spaces below to make words.

1. act _______________
2. hitt _______________
3. vi _______________
4. state _______________
5. need _______________
6. vaca _______________
7. jell _______________
8. quick _______________
9. color _______________
10. poor _______________
11. snow _______________
12. dark _______________
13. funn _______________
14. pass _______________
15. good _______________
16. happi _______________
17. less _______________
18. talk _______________
19. froz _______________
20. ill _______________

Figure 8.13b

Word Checklist I

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ in
___ it
___ a
___ and
___ be
___ can
___ as
___ have
___ at
___ for
___ Score

___ to
___ all
___ will
___ on
___ has
___ that
___ big
___ this
___ second
___ with
___ Score

___ me
___ I
___ good
___ so
___ day
___ had
___ from
___ if
___ he
___ one
___ Score

___ up
___ very
___ there
___ when
___ by
___ the
___ come
___ get
___ go
___ him
___ Score

___ an
___ call
___ words
___ thing
___ tell
___ children
___ which
___ water
___ you
___ find
___ Score

___ do
___ bat
___ first
___ than
___ way
___ think
___ found
___ she
___ away
___ where
___ Score

___ say
___ saw
___ use
___ after
___ these
___ apple
___ eat
___ cap
___ four
___ time
___ Score

___ also
___ bit
___ soon
___ home
___ into
___ house
___ made
___ her
___ over
___ same
___ Score

Figure 8.14a

Word Checklist I

Name________________________________ Date__________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ them
___ what
___ came
___ put
___ two
___ could
___ other
___ under
___ few
___ into
___ Score

___ give
___ here
___ five
___ each
___ cat
___ after
___ because
___ more
___ wait
___ soon
___ Score

___ back
___ but
___ old
___ again
___ write
___ new
___ find
___ jump
___ night
___ until
___ Score

___ just
___ short
___ three
___ said
___ before
___ work
___ school
___ ago
___ well
___ stand
___ Score

___ began
___ they
___ went
___ draw
___ ride
___ ask
___ send
___ red
___ fall
___ land
___ Score

___ sun
___ eleven
___ air
___ my
___ next
___ too
___ another
___ dear
___ is
___ know
___ Score

___ like
___ make
___ little
___ many
___ how
___ no
___ now
___ or
___ see
___ they
___ Score

___ of
___ about
___ some
___ his
___ to
___ we
___ was
___ out
___ take
___ us
___ Score

Figure 8.14b

Word Checklist I

Name________________________________ Date__________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ car
___ begun
___ still
___ sing
___ not
___ ten
___ may
___ six
___ every
___ hide
___ Score

___ moon
___ tree
___ been
___ dog
___ tall
___ white
___ upon
___ say
___ seem
___ sure
___ Score

___ find
___ more
___ it's
___ hat
___ around
___ hit
___ look
___ not
___ much
___ let
___ Score

___ were
___ long
___ then
___ their
___ down
___ which
___ am
___ ever
___ day
___ orange
___ Score

Figure 8.14c

Word Checklist II

Name________________________________ Date____________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ wash
___ food
___ everyone
___ cry
___ cake
___ bed
___ glad
___ drink
___ bill
___ box
___ Score

___ inside
___ circus
___ dark
___ need
___ catch
___ feel
___ face
___ mean
___ never
___ side
___ Score

___ heart
___ nothing
___ miss
___ beside
___ milk
___ himself
___ plant
___ sky
___ fine
___ sing
___ Score

___ hurt
___ inside
___ wind
___ six
___ wet
___ mom
___ cage
___ true
___ winter
___ stay
___ Score

___ please
___ young
___ bright
___ brother
___ pick
___ blow
___ party
___ hide
___ kept
___ belong
___ Score

___ pretty
___ being
___ head
___ family
___ across
___ sentence
___ morning
___ present
___ pie
___ sometimes
___ Score

___ myself
___ country
___ learn
___ zoo
___ once
___ brown
___ boat
___ someone
___ cookies
___ happy
___ Score

___ river
___ start
___ street
___ ready
___ sea
___ rest
___ space
___ really
___ care
___ tiny
___ Score

Figure 8.15a

Word Checklist II

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ against
___ game
___ found
___ enough
___ ground
___ hole
___ heard
___ dirt
___ happen
___ glass
___ Score

___ lived
___ maybe
___ leg
___ room
___ out
___ cloud
___ remember
___ ship
___ show
___ tall
___ Score

___ store
___ seven
___ jet
___ tail
___ else
___ dress
___ strong
___ king
___ desk
___ flow
___ Score

___ pig
___ roll
___ kill
___ throw
___ lady
___ dip
___ sink
___ jar
___ tin
___ began
___ Score

___ down
___ band
___ dad
___ people
___ fell
___ bag
___ gone
___ wall
___ drip
___ swim
___ Score

___ bear
___ wire
___ drill
___ bake
___ butter
___ answer
___ win
___ frog
___ cart
___ held
___ Score

___ pull
___ police
___ war
___ dock
___ carpet
___ flat
___ fat
___ lamp
___ coat
___ easy
___ Score

___ right
___ ear
___ lost
___ fit
___ tonight
___ within
___ nest
___ dust
___ grandma
___ pin
___ Score

Figure 8.15b

Word Checklist II

Name______________________________ Date_________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ wheel
___ voice
___ chew
___ oh
___ true
___ clip
___ knife
___ deep
___ village
___ tap
___ Score

___ bench
___ junk
___ bath
___ drunk
___ cream
___ stay
___ flag
___ happy
___ sock
___ foot
___ Score

___ dance
___ drove
___ bold
___ cash
___ birth
___ useless
___ birthday
___ enter
___ whole
___ chop
___ Score

___ drank
___ bark
___ candy
___ knock
___ chair
___ grass
___ penny
___ blow
___ anyone
___ doctor
___ Score

Figure 8.15c

Word Checklist III

Name________________________________ Date__________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ amount
___ infection
___ fossil
___ laboratory
___ receipt
___ elevator
___ infection
___ newspaper
___ square
___ zero
___ Score

___ temperature
___ residence
___ centimeter
___ magazine
___ gravity
___ digit
___ count
___ sharing
___ pulse
___ component
___ Score

___ triple
___ international
___ rectangle
___ sample
___ credit
___ weight
___ movies
___ quart
___ medicine
___ gram
___ Score

___ solve
___ column
___ location
___ length
___ nurse
___ sequence
___ manual
___ gas
___ segment
___ principal
___ Score

___ material
___ size
___ angle
___ marker
___ century
___ difference
___ ounce
___ equator
___ building
___ satellite
___ Score

___ schedule
___ prime
___ secretary
___ depth
___ solution
___ standard
___ outcome
___ inches
___ emergency
___ magnet
___ Score

___ highway
___ positive
___ sum
___ connect
___ survey
___ radio
___ vertical
___ product
___ rate
___ produce
___ Score

___ plane
___ alarm
___ liter
___ double
___ atom
___ accident
___ balance
___ straight
___ quality
___ prescribe
___ Score

Figure 8.16a

Word Checklist III

Name________________________________ Date__________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ minus
___ data
___ extension
___ addend
___ mathematics
___ parallel
___ numerator
___ business
___ taste
___ scale
___ Score

___ fraction
___ depth
___ mineral
___ nickel
___ microscope
___ pupil
___ capacity
___ universal
___ family
___ thousand
___ Score

___ physical
___ interest
___ equation
___ least
___ pressure
___ equal
___ estimate
___ extinct
___ negative
___ elastic
___ Score

___ opposite
___ reservation
___ horizontal
___ odds
___ volcano
___ recognition
___ calendar
___ denominator
___ pattern
___ entrance
___ Score

___ segment
___ positive
___ surface
___ magnetic
___ infinite
___ liberty
___ northwest
___ liquid
___ battery
___ information
___ Score

___ density
___ random
___ graph
___ even
___ organ
___ experiment
___ skeleton
___ colonial
___ partial
___ chemistry
___ Score

___ insect
___ radiant
___ cube
___ transportation
___ distance
___ manufacture
___ vitamin
___ digestion
___ treatment
___ billion
___ Score

___ actual
___ solid
___ sphere
___ nutrition
___ prediction
___ timetable
___ instructor
___ colony
___ hunger
___ creation
___ Score

Figure 8.16b

Word Checklist III

Name________________________________ Date__________________

Directions: Read each word aloud.

___ industry
___ angle
___ electricity
___ compound
___ statistic
___ scissors
___ unequal
___ federal
___ behavior
___ focus
___ Score

___ direction
___ quotient
___ mass
___ telephone
___ quantity
___ single
___ friction
___ revolutionary
___ locality
___ similar
___ Score

___ money
___ fern
___ multiplication
___ middle
___ ratio
___ civilization
___ whole
___ operator
___ simple
___ telegram
___ Score

___ million
___ complex
___ policy
___ pollute
___ triangular
___ democracy
___ fuel
___ symbol
___ census
___ independence
___ Score

Figure 8.16c

Glossary

Accent. The part of the word that receives greater emphasis or stress in pronunciation. Dictionaries generally place a mark over the accented syllable in a word to assist pronunciation: *gó-ing, for-gét, un-der-stánd-ing.*

Affix. A syllable or syllables—a prefix or suffix—added to the beginning or ending of a word to change its meaning: *undo, renew, going, lovely.*

Alliteration. The repetition of the same sound, usually of a consonant, at the beginning of two or more words: *the sun smiles, the green grass grows.*

Allomorph. One or two forms of the same morpheme. The /z/ as represented by *s* as in boys, the /s/ represented by *s* as in cats, and the /z/ as represented by *es* are all forms, or allomorphs, of the "plural" morpheme.

Alphabetic awareness. Knowledge of the letters of the alphabet and knowledge that letters of the alphabet represent sounds of the spoken language.

Antonym. A word that has the opposite meaning of another word: *tall-short, happy-sad, up-down.*

Compound word. A word made up of two separate words: *cowboy, streetcar, underground.*

Consonant blends. Two or more consonants that come together to produce a new phoneme that results from a blend of the consonant sounds: *black, trace, screw.*

Consonant phoneme. One of two groups of sounds found in English (the other being vowel phonemes). Consonants are produced when outgoing breath is stopped or halted and then released. There are approximately 24 consonant phonemes, plus blends and digraphs.

Context. The environment or circumstances of a spoken or written word that often affect its meaning and help one guess the word's meaning.

Contraction. Two words made into one for ease of pronunciation. An apostrophe is used in place of the missing letter or letters: *I'll, don't, shouldn't.*

Decoding. The process of changing written or printed language into spoken sounds. Decoding is a synonym for reading.

Dialect. A regional version of a language that differs in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary from standard speech patterns or standard usage.

Digraph. A combination of letters used to spell a single sound. Digraphs can be vowel digraphs (*piece, coat, read*) or consonant digraphs (*the, physics, sick*).

Diacritical mark. A dictionary marking above, under, or next to a syllable in a word to indicate pronunciation or stress: *home, ăt, read, âre.*

Diphthong. A sequence of two vowels or semivowels within the same syllable pronounced as a single (joined) vowel: *boil, boys, how.*

Encoding. The process of changing spoken language into printed or written language. Encoding is a synonym for spelling.

Etymology. The origin of a word. The study of the history of a word from its earliest recorded forms to its present spelling and usage.

Fluency. The ease with which one can read or translate printed material into speech.

Grapheme. A written letter of the alphabet. The sum of the letters and letter combinations that can represent phonemes or sounds of the language.

Homograph. A word spelled or written the same as another word, but with a different pronunciation and meaning: *lead–lead, bow–bow, read–read.*

Homophone. A word that is pronounced the same as another word but is spelled differently and has a different meaning: *their–there, here–hear, to–too–two*. Another name for a homophone is *homonym.*

Invented spelling. A spelling method that a writer (generally a child) uses to approximate the proper spelling of a word that he or she may not know. Invented spelling is a temporary method that a writer uses to get ideas down on paper. It should not be equated with proper spelling.

Irregular. An exception to the normal linguistic pattern or rule. Spellings such as *done, laugh, through, enough,* are irregular spellings. *Good, better, best* are exceptions to the *-er, -est* pattern for comparative and superlative of adjectives and therefore irregular.

Linguistics. The scientific study of language. Linguistics includes phonology (sounds), morphology (internal structure of words), syntax (manner in which words combine), and semantics (meaning).

Monosyllable. A word made up of only one sound or syllable: *do, come, straight.*

Morpheme. The smallest meaningful unit in the language. A morpheme can consist of a word or a part of a word. The words *man, wait,* and *noun,* for example, are morphemes. Prefixes like *re-, un-,* and *pre-* and suffixes like *-ly, -ness,* and *-en* are morphemes because they are meaningful parts of a word.

Noun. The name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Nouns can be classified as common nouns, or the general category of persons, places, and things (*dog, child, teacher*). Nouns can also be classified as proper nouns (*Helen, Chicago, Ford Motors*), abstract nouns (*goodness, honesty, bravery*), singular nouns (*car, desk, book*), or plural nouns (*cars, desks, books*).

Orthography. A part of linguistics that deals with understanding the sounds of the language and their representation in alphabetical symbols. Orthography is concerned primarily with the spelling of English.

Phoneme. The speech sound of English produced by a grapheme, or letter: the *m* in *mat,* the *j* in *joy.* Some phonemes are represented by a combination of letters: /th/, /sh/, /ee/, /oa/, /ei/. Some letters may represent more than one phoneme: *c* as in *cat* and *cite, y* as in *yes, by,* and *nicely, o* as in *come* and *home.*

Phonemic awareness. The awareness that written words can be thought of as a sequence of phonemes and using those sounds to make and identify words. Phonemic awareness is a subcategory of phonological awareness.

Phonemics. A part of phonological linguistics that studies and analyses phonemes or sounds of the language.

Phonetics. A branch of physiology that studies the production, transmission, and reception of speech sounds.

Phonics. A method of teaching reading, spelling, and pronunciation that emphasizes learning the sounds of letters and combinations of letters in order to figure out, or sound out, unfamiliar words.

Phonogram. A sequence of letters consisting of a vowel grapheme and a consonant grapheme at the end of a word that represent a common ending sound and can produce many words by adding an initial consonant sound: *-ing—sing, bring, ring, king,* etc.

Phonology. The systematic study of the sound system of a language and how it functions. The goal of phonology is to understand and internalize sounds of the language in order to communicate.

Plural. A word that represents more than one: *children, books, candies.*

Polysyllabic word. A word made up of two or more syllables.

Prefix. An affix or morpheme added to the beginning of a word to change the word's meaning or make a new word: *man–superman, happy–unhappy, new–renew.*

Print awareness. Awareness of how print (printed material) works and how it looks. It includes such concepts as the following: print is made up of letters, letters make up words, words make up sentences, text is read from left to right.

***R*-controlled sound.** The modified vowel sound that comes about when the vowel is followed by *r* in the same syllable: *care, never, fire, cure.*

Reading. The process of getting meaning from printed language. Reading involves recognition of words and understanding of the meaning of words. Reading is communication of the writer to the reader.

Root word. A word without a prefix or suffix. A word before a prefix or suffix has been added.

Semantics. The study or science of the relationship of signs and symbols to what they represent to their interpreters. Understanding the meaning of words.

Sight words. Words recognized by sight rather than being sounded out phonetically. Words with irregular or unusual spelling patterns are called sight words to denote how they ought to be taught: *said, laugh, enough.*

Silent letters. Letters in a word that are not pronounced but that must not be omitted when spelling or writing the word: *lamb, knew, often.*

Singular. A word that represents only one.

Spelling. Naming or writing the letters of a word in proper order. The process of encoding or putting spoken sounds and words into written symbols.

Suffix. An affix or morpheme added to the end of a word to alter or change its meaning: *kind–kindness, dark–darker, force–forcefully.*

Syllable. A unit of spoken language consisting of a single uninterrupted sound formed by a vowel or diphthong alone or with a consonant. A syllable always contains a vowel sound or it may have a vowel-consonant combination such as V, CV, VC, CVC. The word *go* has one syllable. The word *understanding* has four syllables.

Syllabication. The division of a word into syllables.

Synonym. A word that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word in the same language: *beautiful–gorgeous, evil–bad, funny–humorous.*

Syntax. The manner in which words are combined to form phrases and sentences. Rules that govern the use of the language.

Verb. A word that expresses action or state of being. Every complete sentence must contain a verb.

Vowel phoneme. One of two groups of sounds (the other being consonant phonemes). Vowels are reproduced by vibration of the vocal cords with no stoppage of the outgoing air. English contains five vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*) and one sometimes vowel (*y*), which, by themselves or in combination with other vowels, produce approximately 22 vowel phonemes or sounds.

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There are
one-story intellects,
two-story intellects, and three-story
intellects with skylights. All fact collectors, who
have no aim beyond their facts, are one-story men. Two-story men
compare, reason, generalize, using the labors of the fact collectors as
well as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine,
predict—their best illumination comes from
above, through the skylight.
*—Oliver Wendell
Holmes*

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TEACHING PHONICS for BALANCED READING

Almost everything we do involves having the ability to read, such as following traffic signs, working on the computer, buying groceries, and, of course, enjoying a good book. Reading is a fundamental skill that students need to master to function successfully in today's society. The challenge for every elementary teacher is to decide which method is the best strategy to use to teach students fundamental reading skills. *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* presents the positive role phonics can play in a student's ability to learn to read. This book emphasizes that phonics can be extremely beneficial when it is integrated as a part of a balanced reading program.

Based on the author's real-world experience, *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* covers the entire range of practical phonics applications for the elementary classroom. This book is divided into easy to understand sections that cover the major aspects of phonics. Every section contains multiple phonics skills that can be applied immediately in the classroom. Also included are practical, hands-on activities to help teachers get started, as well as sample informal assessments to gauge students' level of knowledge.

Teachers who use the strategies in *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* can help their students not only learn how to read but also to enjoy reading. Teaching students to read well is one of the most important gifts teachers can give to their students.

Edmund V. Starrett

Edmund Starrett is a retired elementary teacher who has taught remedial reading and has several years experience as a district-wide reading coordinator. He has also been involved in programs for the mentally challenged and the gifted. He is a published author of several children's books, an educational game, and workbooks in reading and handwriting. Edmund received his Doctor of Education Degree from Wayne State University.

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